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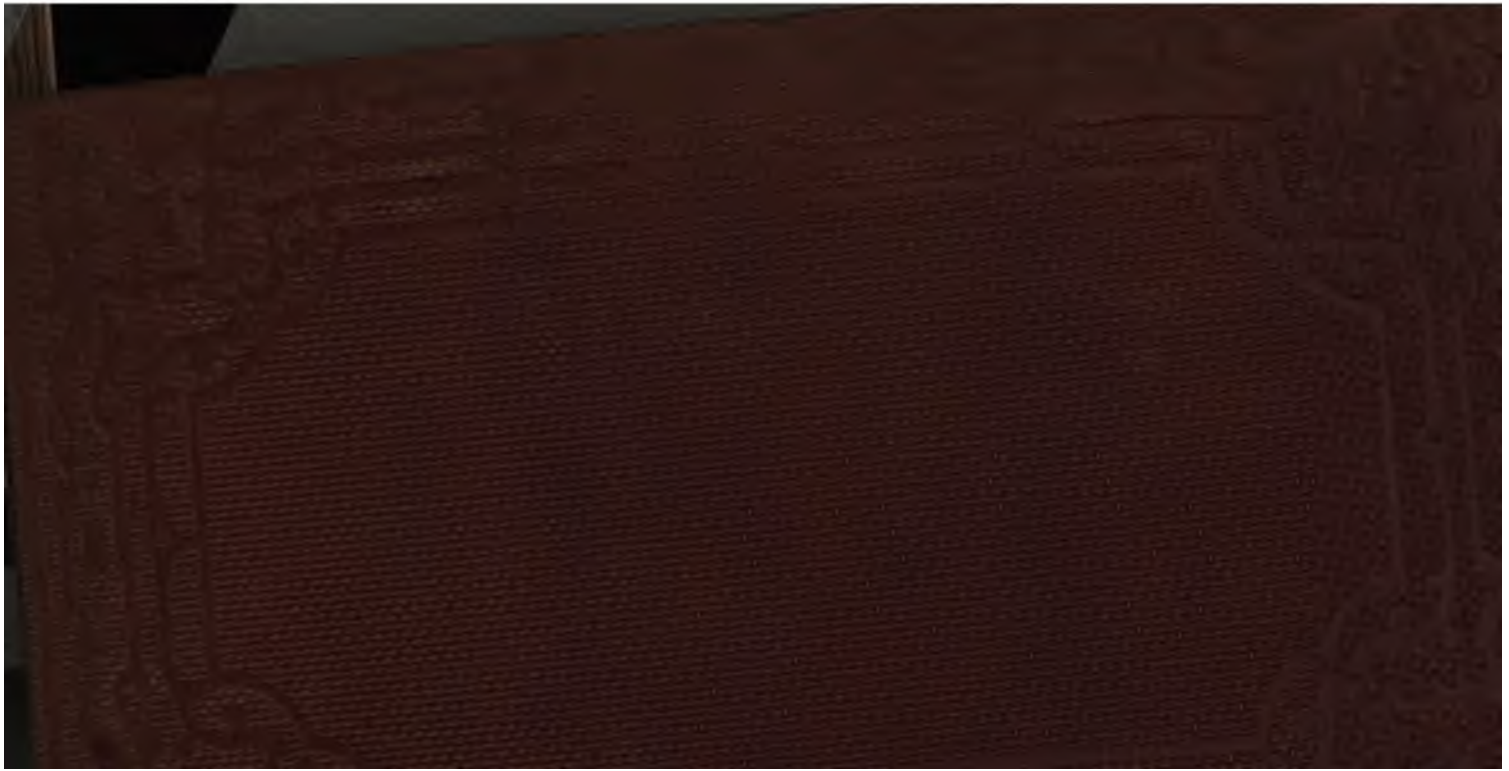

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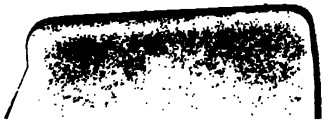

MARGARET HAMILTON.

A NOVEL.

BY MRS. C. J. NEWBY,

AUTHOR OF "MABEL," "SUNSHINE AND SHADOW."

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MARGARET HAMILTON.

CHAPTER I.

"I MUST never speak of him again," Margaret had said to herself; and yet, as they all walked round the little garden after dinner, and Mr. Travers was again by her side, she felt impelled to return to the subject, and something Mr. Travers had said, suggested her question.

"Did you ever know papa, since you speak of him so kindly?"

"I used to keep a small account at the

bank," he replied, "and it so happened, that I was one amongst the creditors whom he met on the day of the failure."

"Indeed," said Margaret with some surprise. "I thought creditors—that is, men in the character of creditors—were all hard-hearted!"

"Nay, nay, not upon that day, at least. Your father met us in such a manner as would disarm all reproach; and though it is a great deal to say, I think I never admired any man so much in my life. Was it not true," he added suddenly, "that you were there with him all that anxious day?"

"True, indeed," exclaimed Margaret, passionately, "that day was worth years of life to me."

"Poor child!" said Mr. Travers, more to himself than to her; but a merry smile from her recalled him from the reverie into which he seemed to be about to fall, and he looked down upon her with anxious earnestness,

saying gently, "You are a child to me, are you not?"

"I have heard," said she, with the same contumacious smile, "that all authors are vain. No doubt, in intellect, I am but a child to you."

"Not in intellect, in years, Miss Hamilton. I am almost old enough to be your father. I would willingly," he added more lightly, "leap back a few years in life, and stand by your side; but since that may not be, let me be your friend, or as one who had been your father's friend in days gone by."

"If you will make half as good a friend as my father does, I will willingly accept you in that character."

"Will you? That is a compact then; from henceforth we are friends. Give me your hand upon it."

Margaret laughingly placed her hand in the one extended, and as he held it for a moment in his, a turn in the walk suddenly

brought Richard upon them. Had Margaret known less of the world, she might have blushed and looked foolish; but as it was, she said without suffering any embarrassment to be perceptible.

"Mr. Travers has been kind enough to enlist me amongst his numerous friends."

"Indeed!" said Richard, with the slightest appearance of contempt in his tone. "But can you spare time for a few minutes' conversation with me? It is nearly tea time, or I would not interrupt you, and I go early to-morrow."

"Certainly," said Margaret with some little alarm, as she perceived he was speaking with effort.

"Do not think of me," said Mr. Travers, seeing she was about to apologize for leaving him so abruptly, "I am going in."

"The air *is* a little damp," said Richard, "and scents of rheumatism."

"Does it?" said Mr. Travers coldly, as he turned away, and walked towards the house.

"How could you be so rude, Richard?" said Margaret petulantly.

Richard laughed bitterly.

"I only wish to stand between you and your unguarded judgment, Margaret."

She did not ask wherefore, but walked on by his side at an uneven pace, nervously pulling to pieces the rose she held in her hand, and seemingly angry both with herself and him.

Meanwhile, Richard marked her anxiously, and they took one or two rapid turns in silence.

"When did you meet this man before?" He enquired after a while.

Margaret paused a moment, and then said, though somewhat coldly,

"Mr. Travers carried poor Fred off the ice when he broke his leg, and took us home when I could not have taken him safely without great difficulty. I have heard of him once since then, as nobly defending my father

when he was criticized in company, and when even my aunt was afraid to acknowledge that she was his sister."

She said every word distinctly, but continued walking as rapidly as before.

"Margaret," Richard said after another pause, "this man is practised in sentimental friendship."

"How do you know?" asked Margaret quickly.

"Had you been in society for the last year, you would have heard as much about him as I now tell you."

"It may be," said Margaret coldly, "but was it to tell me this you came out? if so, we may as well go in, for tea must be waiting."

"Not quite yet," said Richard, looking at his watch, "not for ten minutes, in that time you will make my mind easy. Will you not?"

She did not seem to care to notice how

different all this was, from his usual manner, and that the cold man of business was evidently off his guard. The crimson spot had deepened on her cheek, and she seemed herself but ill at ease, as she impatiently pushed aside the tangled branches which overhung the walk.

"You, Margaret," said Richard, bending down to look in her face, with fiery eyes, in which all the excitement of which he was capable, had suddenly flashed out, and asserted itself.

"You, Margaret, with all your talents and attractions, would never surely give your affections to a married man?"

"A married man!" exclaimed Margaret, turning her eyes now fully upon him, but with such a world of feeling, of horror and surprise flashing from them, that Richard turned pale.

"Pardon me, Margaret," he said coldly,

"a widower I should have said, but you have betrayed yourself."

"This is unmanly, Richard," she said, confronting him now with such a lightning glance, that had he not been urged on by strong passion, he would have quailed before it.

"I have betrayed nothing, only that I have suffered Mr. Travers to engross more of my conversation, than would perhaps have been right had he been a married man."

"Let me put the case better then," said Richard with a sneer; "you would not surely, with your opportunities of marrying better, bestow your affections on a widower with a grown up family?"

"You have no right to speak to me in this way, and you shall not," cried Margaret, as she turned upon him with a burst of passionate feeling, which she seemed scarcely to care to control.

"But you can give me the right," he said, drawing near her with passionate admiration, which her impetuous temper only seemed to increase, "believe me, I do but seek to guard you from a snare."

Margaret met his eye coldly and defiantly, as if whatever his words might be, she had no intention of escaping them, with any maidenly timidity.

Richard approached still nearer, something there was in his face, a mingling of such passionate love, with such ineffable condescension, that the flush deepened on Margaret's cheek, and her splendid eyes glared upon him; but when he passed his arm round her waist, and would have drawn her to him, she turned suddenly round, and whispering almost in his ear, "Remember Starborne Street!" hastened past him, and before he could overtake her, she had entered the house. "She is but jealous," Richard said, as he walked back

to try and tranquillize his feelings, before he encountered his mother, "she is but jealous. It was too bad of me to withdraw my attentions; but then as she so wisely suggests, 'Starborne Street.' No it is too late, Margaret shall be mine, in spite of that; and stay, I never thought of this before, why not redeem her father's fortunes? At all events, the taming of a such a young tigress gives an impulse to life which I never felt before."

CHAPTER II.

MARGARET sat by the window looking out at the shadows gathering in the twilight. There was in her face, and about her drooping figure, that weariness, which is the evidence of past excitement; sometimes her bosom heaved with a low sigh, which would not be suppressed, but oftener she looked out dreamily, and languidly at those still shadows in the little garden.

Aunt Ann kept up a desultory conversation with Miss Anstruther, partly as a cover to her own anxiety; but Mr. Travers

leaning back upon a distant sofa did not join in it. His deeply intellectual eyes, in whose expression there rested now an exquisite sadness, looked out from his shadowy corner watching Margaret.

What was the cause of this emotion, so painfully, and yet so ineffectually hidden? he speculated. Had they quarrelled in the garden? Was she watching now for Richard's return? What sentiment had produced that tear, which, even now, she so stealthily and quickly brushed aside?

Poor Margaret! her thoughts were certainly not to be envied; she had been angry and with cause, but thus angry she had been ungenerous. It was true, that since the failure, Richard had refrained from seeking her; but for this she had been grateful, she had never loved him, and the sudden withdrawal of old attentions had prevented what might have caused much unhappy argument at home.

They had met again, and under the impulse of jealousy, his attachment had revived. Under the same impulse, he had been ungenerous to Mr. Travers, and yet through all, she should have done him justice, she should have been generous to the faults of that love, which, wherever or however offered, she would have rejected? She had, too, been far more angry than she had shewn herself to be, and she drew back appalled from the anger which she had felt. And why; she began to guess now that Richard had told a hard truth, in a manner unusually hard and uncompromising. What had the grown up family of Mr. Travers to do with her? It was no use asking that question now; it had a great deal, as her conscience whispered, however much she might bid it back and crush it down.

Yet there he sat, a man evidently scarcely

more than forty, with all the grace, even in his appearance of that strong intellect and playful imagination, which had made his fame, and placed him in the foremost rank amongst literary men, and yet the hard truth remained, a widower with a grown up family. No, Richard was angry and jealous, but he never would have repeated a mere rumour, or an untruth. She did not rebel against the fact itself, for she had long ago decided, that every man's position in life has its disadvantages. But she did rebel at the way in which she had learnt it. The suppression of the fact had been, she felt certain, a suppression intended upon Aunt Ann's part, who somehow, perhaps, from some natural crookedness of judgment, always walked aside upon the smoothed and straightened road. She did not like to be managed. Very few strong characters do, least of all did she

like to be managed by Aunt Ann, to whose faults, however much she loved her, she had never been blind.

She did not think Mr. Travers had intended such concealment, she comprehended easily enough, that though he could bring out a thought or a sentiment, and sift and analyze it, he was shy of talking of his own affairs or circumstances, and left them always in the back ground. Why this was, she did not then stop to consider, it satisfied her at the moment, and that was sufficient.

Then her thoughts and her feelings travelled on, already they were passing the rugged ground. This disadvantage, (she purposely gave it a worldly name,) placed them upon an equality. It rendered what she had scarcely dared even to dream of, more possible. She had not either been deceived by her vanity; Richard himself, slow to imagine, had perceived a regard in Mr. Tra-

vers's attentions to herself; she began to feel grateful to Richard for forcing her to feel this, however roughly. Yet again came a feeling which had she known his position before, would not have intruded at all, a jealousy of the dead.

But should she, therefore, shut out the sunshine which had visited her prison-house.? Oh no, it was impossible!

Richard now came in, and having taken his tea-cup from his mother, seated himself by his cousin's side, and began to converse with her in low tones. She was ashamed of her past anger, and replied to him kindly and freely, yet endeavouring to prevent his misunderstanding her. But this was difficult, they never had understood each other. Richard's vanity and self-love were between them, and these were impregnable.

The evening wore slowly away, until Aunt Ann, who was heartily tired of it, proposed retiring to rest. As Margaret was

leaving the room, Richard slipped a strip of paper into her hand, pressing it as he did so.

When she reached her room, she held it to the light. It was written in pencil, but in Richard's upright business hand-writing, and was easily read.

"Come down to the garden by seven o'clock to-morrow morning, dear Margaret, and I will tell you what I meant last night.

"Ever yours,

"R. DAVENTRY."

Had Margaret loved Richard, she would probably have resented this summons to hear his good will and pleasure, but as it was, it did not affect her more, than by puzzling her very much as to how she should answer it, without offending him still more. Then she sat down and wrote.

"My dear Richard,

"If I were to come, I could but tell you how sorry I am now that I was too angry last night at what you said. Pray forgive me, and believe me always,

"Your affectionate cousin.

"MARGARET."

That will do, she said to herself, as she folded her note, for the future I will trust to "Phillip fasting" that is to Richard upon a week day.

Her heart smote her, however, when on the following morning from her window she perceived Richard walking up and down the gravel walk, his arms folded, and himself in deeply abstracted thought. Never had he looked so well, he was that morning almost handsome, perhaps because there was more expression in his face than usual. His well made coat of the finest cloth gave an air

of refinement to his person. Margaret's heart whispered, "Are you certain you will never repent this?"

Timidly, then, she called a housemaid who was passing down the passage, and giving her her little note, asked her to take it to Mr. Daventry in the garden. She wished to prevent his walking there for nothing, and seeming to himself ridiculous. And then, she returned to the window to see if her note were delivered, and how he took it.

There he was, coming up the walk. The gate was swinging upon its hinges, and Mr. Travers, returning from his early walk, advanced to the house the same way, passing Richard just as the housemaid had approached him, holding her note very conspicuously in her hand. She saw Mr. Travers hurry on, while Richard read the note two or three times, and then, as if puzzled, put it in his pocket with some ceremony, as he also walked towards the house. She took care

to be very late at breakfast, which that morning was an hour earlier, upon Richard's account. She thus avoided any possibility of a tête-à-tête, for she rightly guessed that something more urgent than the state of his feelings must occur before her money-making cousin missed the train, or failed to appear at his usual time upon 'Change. So thoroughly, indeed, had the lover vanished in the man of business, that by the time she reached the breakfast table, he with an open Bradshaw by his side was hurrying through his meal, with seemingly but one thought, and that, the being in time for the train. His mother's carriage waited to take him to the station, and the parting adieux were hastily said, as they always are, even by the most punctual. Yet Richard had time to whisper to Margaret, "I shall look forward to next Saturday." A very simple sentence, to which she replied by wishing him a pleasant journey, what more could she say to

such an ambiguous compliment; and then followed the noise made by the shutting up of the steps, and the carriage rolled off with its precious burden, as majestically as a carriage could leave such a hilly situation. Richard was gone, and Miss Anstruther yawned; then smiled to cover the yawn, and drawing her work-frame to the window, sat down to employ herself, and to get rid of the extra hour which the early breakfast had forced upon her hands.

CHAPTER III.

As soon as Richard had fairly departed, Mrs. Daventry recovered her spirits. He had gone, and there was nothing of the dénouement she had feared. Mr. Travers was left in possession of the field, and much might happen before next Saturday, if not, her son, at least, would have the benefit of six week days before they met again, and of the value of these she was as much aware as Margaret. She did not take time to think that Richard might have improved his moral

nature by a union with his cousin, and that in shutting out from him the first and only romance his heart had perhaps ever known, she was doing him unspeakable injury, she only decided that however much she had once wished for it, the match was no longer a fitting one.

She was careful to conceal this from Margaret herself, and was on this morning, more than usually anxious for her company. She insisted upon her accompanying her to her dressing-room, and during a long gossip upon dress, she would have made her many expensive presents, in lace and jewellery, had not Margaret declined them all with laughing firmness.

"What can this be?" cried Aunt Ann, with as much curiosity as a child, as she stood by the open window, "here is a servant in Mr. Mortham's livery."

"Who is Mr. Mortham?" enquired Margaret.

"Oh! you know he has that nice house you admired so much amongst the hills. You met young Mortham at my house, though you pretend to forget him. I thought they were in Paris. You see they are not, and have found me out somehow. How, I wonder?"

"The arrivals are always in the country papers, aunt, and, of course, your name is amongst them."

At this moment, the maid entered, and her mistress held out her hand to take the note she brought as eagerly as if it contained an invitation to her first ball.

"It is, indeed, an invitation," she cried aloud, as she read, "to a little dance on Thursday, and a note of apology for so short a notice, as they did not know before that we were here—an invitation for all my party, particularly including 'my charming niece.'"

"I wonder," she said to herself, as she sat

down to answer the note, "whether that foolish, romantic Mrs. Mortham has forgotten how struck her son was with Meg at my ball, just before the crash. Well, if she has, so much the better, for he will be some day richer than Mr. Travers, and is not a widower. Well-a-day! I must play my cards with care."

"Meg," said she aloud, having despatched her answer, "what dress will you wear?"

"My white silk will do, will it not?" she enquired, with some anxiety, for Margaret was a woman.

"Oh, dear me, no!" cried Aunt Ann, in horror, "it is, at least, an inch too short in the waist, if not more. Besides, my dear, every one knows, all England knows your father's circumstances, and, therefore, nothing will be more becoming in you than elegant simplicity; a white muslin and a wreath of lilies of the valley in your hair, or even

nothing, that would look still more inexpensive."

"And be so too," laughed Margaret, "but, be assured, poverty oftener appears in silk an inch too short-waisted for the fashion, than in white muslin of the latest make, and except the one I wore yesterday at dinner, I have no other. No, my dear aunt, poverty is very unbecoming, and is not elegant simplicity, as I am beginning to learn. So please, let the white silk do, or leave me at home to sketch the church from the window."

"You shall have a simple white muslin, yet," persisted Mrs. Daventry, "and since you will have none of my finery, you shall have that. I will go this very afternoon to seek a milliner."

"Remember, I am already seriously in your debt, dear aunt."

"And I wonder how you ever mean to pay me, if that is what you mean," said Aunt Ann, gaily, "unless from a husband's purse."

Margaret's heart sank within her, and as soon as she could well do so, she escaped to her own room.

The thoughtless expressions of her aunt awakened in her mind a new apprehension. It was too true; not only was she poor, but in debt. Impossible as it had seemed with her poor hopeless trials to discharge this terrible debt, it would be still more so to attempt, as her aunt had suggested, to do so from a husband's purse. How, if married, could she confess it when she could never give any full explanation?

In another mood, she might have solved such a difficulty; but now that it, for the first time, presented itself, it seemed insurmountable.

She had bolted her door, that no one might see the agitation she was enduring, and now, with her face covered by her hands, she shut out the sight of the many little comforts by which she was surrounded,

and as if it were a selfishness to enjoy them, she sent herself in imagination back to Starborne Street.

Weakly and wickedly had she uttered that name in bitter reproach to her cousin; it rose up now against her as a memory that would not be held back. She saw it not in connexion with the merry family counsels; the evening readings, the restored love, and the many blessings which still made it "home." But in its daily pinching trials, its little, but never-ceasing economies, her brother's stinted appetite, her sisters denied all the luxuries which to her had seemed once but habitual necessities, and more than all, her father, forsaken by her, left to younger hands, and because less knowing, therefore less feeling hearts.

These all rose up against her, as in our dark moods, evils sometimes band together to overwhelm us, and hot, burning tears coursed each other slowly and heavily down

her cheeks. In the midst of all, that terrible debt—terrible not so much from its amount as from its cause, and from the secresy necessary in paying it, made itself felt.

A strange inconsistency it certainly was, which made her aunt so generous, nay, so lavish in her wish to make her presents, and yet could allow her to allude to so delicate a matter as a debt between them. These thoughtless allusions of Mrs. Daventry were frequently used in their daily dialogues, with the intention of forcing Margaret to adopt those worldly views of marriage which her aunt was so fond of advocating. Aunt Ann was inconsistent, it is true; but, nevertheless, had it occurred to her that Margaret was really in distress about the money, she would probably have held the most perfect silence with regard to it; but as she never felt her tradespeople's bills, unless pressed for their payment, she did not imagine it possible that Margaret could feel a

debt which she never intended to be paid until she grew rich, by some of the many means which always flitted as possibilities before her brain.

It was a very long time before Margaret could compose herself, or still the anxious thoughts which, for a while, resumed their empire over her mind. After an hour of weary thought, she drew her writing materials to her, and, weeping at intervals, even then, wrote to Olivia. This was some consolation.

It was a long letter, full of deep anxieties, and passionate love for her father, vain longings that she might find some way by which she might sacrifice her life for their advantage; dreams of seeking a situation as a governess, or of educating herself for a national school teacher. A letter full, indeed, of earnest love, and of the agony of an over-wrought, but self-devoted mind; but which would have made Olivia very uncom-

fortable. And so Margaret thought when she reached the signature, for then she slowly tore it up, and closing her desk with a sigh, she knelt down by her bed, and leaning her head upon it, after an interval of prayer, sunk exhausted with emotion into a deep sleep.

When she awoke, her mind was refreshed, though she was still subdued, and she felt humbled and contrite. She now blamed herself severely for permitting a short season of sunshine to recall the old pride which she had so often fought against, and which through a long time of trial and suffering, she had believed really subdued. Her present depressed mood, she received as her first punishment, and bitterly did she now regret that any provocation had led her into treating Richard with petulance and unkindness. She knew that this fiery mood of hers had struck unwonted sparks from his cold and phlegmatic nature; but

she blamed it none the less severely, because she felt assured, that her passionate independence had been more attractive to him, than any virtue she possessed. What happiness it must be, she thought then, to be accepted and loved for that within us, which is really the best, the truest, and the most genuinely good. And then a bright beaming look crossed her countenance, as, in spite of circumstance or draw back, one hope would assert itself. It came like the rainbow in the midst of the storm.

CHAPTER IV.

MARGARET did not venture to go down-stairs until dinner-time, but she had feared without reason, that her agitation would attract the attention and remark of her aunt. She found her in a perfect flutter of good spirits, for in all her moods she was extremely demonstrative. She told Margaret then, that Mr. Travers had met his friend Mr. Sneyd in town, who had wished him to dine with him at the Albion, but she had said, "why not bring him here?" and

Mr. Travers had graciously consented, and Mr. Sneyd was really coming.

"Margaret," she said, "I am getting quite into a literary set. I must read, really, I must read; but then," she added laughingly, "I can talk, which is almost as well."

"And, perhaps, better," said Margaret, "for few authors are disinclined to have the talking done for them."

"Perhaps not," said Aunt Ann consideringly, "still if I had only known it—well it cannot be helped—I have not; but have you read his last novel?"

"Yes, indeed," said Margaret, "we had it from Mudie's. Papa read it out, and we liked it very much."

"How fortunate! I wonder now," she said, at length, "whether he would take a fancy to Miss Anstruther."

"What! match making again!" laughed Margaret, "you will burn your fingers

soon, dear Aunt Ann, and then do not say I have not warned you."

"Here they come," cried the heedless lady, as she hurried forward to meet the two gentlemen as they entered, saying a hundred graceful, airy welcomes, in a manner which was very taking, and had a few years since been very captivating.

Mr. Sneyd was a quiet, retiring man, dressed in a quiet and gentlemanly manner, and had he not been Mr. Sneyd, he would probably have passed in the crowd of human beings who cross our path perpetually, and been but little noticed. But as he was Mr. Sneyd, Margaret, regarding him with attention, discovered a witty curve about the mouth, and an earnest scrutiny peering out from the eyes, which she willingly accepted as the witnesses of high intellect.

Aunt Ann was delighted, two authors of such high repute did indeed full justice

to any care she might have bestowed in catering for them. The only thing which half annoyed, and yet half amused her, was that during dinner they talked just like other men, only perhaps a little more simply, and with much less pretension. Mr. Travers was in a very serious mood, and said very little to any one, and Miss Anstruther seemed to think the burden of conversation did not rest with her; but smiled nevertheless, though there was not much to smile at, and looked exceedingly amiable. Aunt Ann trying to be consistent, felt that she ought to admire her very much, and yet had a strange temptation to get near her and give her a shake.

It was not until the dinner was fairly concluded, that the conversation took any thing like a literary turn, and then it was desperately started by Aunt Ann.

"Why is it, I wonder," she said,

turning to Mr Travers, whom she regarded now as a tame lion: "how is it that novels are so openly read now? Why I remember when I was a girl, if I ever read one, which was not very seldom, I fear, it was always in secret, now there are very few girls who would take the trouble to conceal their book."

"The answer is easy," replied Mr. Travers, "that department of literature is now in the hands of talented men and women, and the books, which rest now in the back shelves of our libraries, would in very few instances, obtain publishers in the present day."

"I think," observed Mr. Sneyd, taking up the subject with an interest which delighted his hostess, "we owe very much to the removal of that very narrow prejudice, which once branded every clever woman, every literary woman rather, as a blue-stocking."

"In what way?" enquired Margaret.

"Why," said Mr. Sneyd, "she has refined literature, as well as everything else, and we are indebted to her for the spread of many fine thoughts, and high-toned ideas, which, at one time, would have been known only to a small circle of friends."

"True," said Mr. Travers, "we owe almost as much to Miss Edgeworth as to Walter Scott. He supplied a standard which, at once, gave fiction its proper place, and stimulated those who had before despised its puerilities, to conquer its difficulties; while Miss Edgeworth opened the door to the rest of her sex, and thus introduced a refinement of language, and a delicacy of sentiment into book making, which is more and more evident as society progresses."

"Do you think," said Margaret, "that books have more effect upon society, than society has upon books?"

"It is a difficult question, certainly," said Mr. Travers, "but I should be inclined to say, that books had their decided effect upon society."

"Or," said Mr. Sneyd, "books may only be the pulse, by which we feel its state of health."

"Hardly so," said Mr. Travers, "for what revolutions in the sentiments, and manners of a people have been made by a book, the work of one mind acting upon the mass. Don Quixote, for instance, banished an immense deal of nonsense from Spain; and Chesterfield's Letters, I do believe, had a very powerful effect upon the manners of England. Other books, I have little doubt, produce effects as strong, though they may not always be so palpable."

"How rapidly, too, civilization has advanced since the invention of printing," said Margaret.

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Travers, "and therefore I think I am correct in supposing that writers have the power of leading the public taste, and spreading civilization, by which term I mean the utmost refinement, and elevation of judgment and feeling."

Finding that the conversation was getting beyond her depth, Aunt Ann nevertheless dashed into it at all hazards.

"Then you do not think it idle to read novels?"

Mr. Sneyd coloured at this direct advance upon his ground; but Mr. Travers replied: "Not at all, of course all things in their right time."

"Do give me some good reason," said Aunt Ann, not noticing Mr. Sneyd's temporary look of annoyance, "for every one thinks it so wise and clever and good to abuse novel reading."

"If it excludes, or misplaces other reading," said Mr. Travers, "I should equally find fault

with it, but I do not think it does. Those who confine themselves to fiction, I am inclined to believe, would, failing that, read nothing; and those whose minds can grasp weightier subjects, seldom, I may say never set them aside for the sake of lighter reading, though they may well combine both."

"And what is a novel?" said Margaret, "but the history of feeling and of morals; and he who has elevated their standard in any mind, even by one thought or sentiment, has done nobly. I never could look down upon a plan of writing which by illustration gives us, perhaps, the very best methods of judging of right and wrong in our own road in life."

"True," said Mr. Travers, "we may draw national morals from a nation's history, but perhaps the rules which regulate our own are best gathered from the history of individuals."

"Then would not biography answer every purpose?" said Miss Anstruther with a calm-

ness which left Mr. Sneyd wondering why it was that she had not spoken before.

"It might," said Mr. Travers, "only, of course, we only write the biographies of great men, and we cannot all be great men you know. It is, therefore, rather a good thing to be able to fancy situations of difficulty, and to decide as to the right way of getting out of them, or matters of opinion, and questions of delicacy and judgment, which perhaps could hardly form the distinct subjects for essays."

"Then you do not think it wrong to read novels?" said Aunt Ann, addressing herself more particularly to Mr. Sneyd, who replied seriously,

"Do you suppose it possible? how then could I write them?"

"Ah, indeed!" said Aunt Ann.

"You must not be too severe upon us poor authors," said Mr. Travers good-naturedly, "I hope you do not think we make books only to sell them."

"No, indeed, for I know you can do without it, but now tell me why you do write?"

"Why, indeed!" said Mr. Travers, "ask Sneyd."

"He won't tell if I do. Why do you write books, Mr. Sneyd? Ah! I know, to gratify your vanity, eh Mr. Travers?"

"Say rather," he observed, with a smile, "because there is a natural impulse within us which forces us to develope the talents we possess. As little could that honeysuckle refrain from blooming, as Sneyd, there, could abstain from gratifying the public with his—"

"Humbug," said Mr. Sneyd.

"Well, if you say so," said Mr. Travers, with mock gravity, "far be it from me to contradict any friend, much less yourself."

"Well," said Aunt Ann, "you are very uncommunicative; and, therefore, I will go and make the tea; when you are disposed

to behave better you may follow. Come girls."

While Mrs. Daventry went to the drawing-room, Miss Anstruther linked her arm in Margaret's, and led her to the garden.

"I was so afraid they would quarrel," said she. "Margaret, why did you not come to the rescue, and help your Aunt?"

"Because," said Margaret, "she gets out of difficulty as easily as she gets into it; and nobody would be so silly as to quarrel with Aunt Ann."

"Perhaps you are right, dear. Do you not think these literary men very stupid? for my part, I infinitely prefer hearing your cousin Richard, to the—"

"Indeed!" said Margaret, and then she thought, "was the poison really working, even under such contrary circumstances?"

"You do not admire Mr. Daventry, do you dear?" said Miss Anstruther, with a little laugh.

"I never said I did not," said Margaret.

"I think myself," said Miss Anstruther, "that he is very handsome and clever. He must be clever to have made so much money, must he not?"

"Yes, I think he must."

"Don't you think he admires you very much, or is it only cousinly affection?"

"We have known each other all our lives," said Margaret, evasively, "and, of course, he likes me from habit."

"You think that is all—you are certain?" said Miss Anstruther, earnestly.

"Why do you ask?" said Margaret, looking at her searchingly.

"Oh! because one likes to know, of course," said Miss Anstruther, laughing a little, and colouring very much, "but you do not care about him I see, though you will not give a direct answer."

"Because," said Margaret, "I object to the

habit which some girls have of refusing people by wholesale, when, perhaps, they never had the opportunity of accepting them. It is not quite right, is it?"

"No, perhaps not, only you need not mind me, and you know I thought because—because he went away to-day, and you have been crying, you know dear, as I was so sorry to see."

"But not about Richard," said Margaret, earnestly, "nor about anything here be assured."

"Oh! then I am very glad," said Miss Anstruther, quietly, "but I was vexed to see you."

"Let us come in," said Margaret, "for I see the gentlemen in the drawing-room, and Aunt Ann will not like us to stay out, as Mr. Sneyd said he was going back early to write letters."

Miss Anstruther turned good-naturedly,

and at once, and they walked into the house through the glass door of the passage which generally stood open.

CHAPTER V.

"I AM sorry you are going to-morrow, as Mr. Travers tells me you are," said Mrs. Daventry, addressing her guest.

"You are very kind," he replied, with a bow.

"I suppose," she queried, "you move about for profit as well as amusement, and, if so, you cannot see much of a place in two days. I hear it said that some authors write tours of places they have never seen, but I cannot believe it."

"Certainly," said Mr. Travers, "it must be a troublesome mode of doing business, since it must be much more difficult to draw from fancy than from facts."

"Yes," said Mr. Sneyd, "what is drawn from one's own mind exhausts it more than the simple portraiture of that which passes before us."

"Well, really then," said Aunt Ann, "you should stay a little longer here. You know you might put Hastings into a book. Could you not?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Sneyd.

"And," said Mrs. Daventry, "there is such a funny Robinson Crusoe place built, no not built exactly, but contrived in the rock just below the fish-market. You should see that. I have often thought what a pretty retreat it would make for a hero flying from his creditors, or something."

"Not from his creditors," said Mr. Travers, who saw that Mr. Sneyd rather disliked being

questioned, "it would not be in keeping with his character. A man who has sacrificed his honour for the sake of his whims, or his comforts, or extravagancies, flies somewhere where he may still indulge them, he is not the kind of man to be forced, even by danger, into the retreat of a Robinson Crusoe."

"Perhaps not," said his hostess, "nevertheless it is a pretty little place, and might tell in a book somehow, I cannot but think. The man keeps chickens and all sorts of things up on that ledge of rock, and is very comfortable I dare say; only I never had the courage to climb up to look at his stores. A sailor told me he had every thing in complete order, and that people went up constantly to see him."

"By which he makes a good market, no doubt," said Mr. Sneyd, "but destroys all the real interest of his situation. Having made the study of men and manners my profession, I like, it is true, to see how far cockneyism

extends, and to mark its different features in different places; but for my own pleasure, I prefer seeing nature, where it is distinct, simple, and unhackneyed, which it never is at one of these watering places."

"The railroads," observed Mr. Travers, "have made most of our sea-side places but suburbs of London, and our larger towns. Just at present it creates a feeling of disappointment in those who travel in search of human novelty, but in a little while the benefit must be perceptible. One change is already very plain, and that is that the English language, in its modified purity, will soon be spoken all over the country; freed from the peculiarities of dialect, which however amusing, certainly obscure its beauty. I particularly noticed this in the Isle of Wight. I was visiting in Ryde, and had the opportunity of seeing some of the poor people, as my friend is a clergyman. At that time, I was struck with nothing so

much as with their purity of dialect, which had little or nothing of the Hampshire drawl about it; and the words used too were appropriate, and the sentences almost always faultless in grammar. In some parts of the island, I was told that the native Hampshire was to be found in perfection, but though I went about a great deal, it was never my fortune to find it, except among the middle classes, who had not been thrown so much into communication with the strangers and tourists, I suppose, and had not therefore forfeited their birthright."

"I shall be sorry, I must confess," said Mr. Sneyd, "to see the old land marks removed. I am very fond of marking the distinct pronunciations peculiar to different counties."

"I never feel that," said the refined Mr. Travers, "it would, I fear, be difficult to me to attend to the finest idea addressed, nay disfigured by the horrible patois one some-

times meets with, and which is never so hateful to me as when upon the lips of a pretty woman who, in that case, to me at least, has but to speak to destroy her chance of charming."

"I should not like to be the girl you admired," laughed Mr. Sneyd, "for if I put a word in its wrong place, I should be afraid you would run away. Do you not wonder at such a man ever having the courage to marry?" he said, turning to Mrs. Daventry. "I believe he feels with Byron that a woman ought never to be seen to eat. Don't you Travers?"

"Oh dear! I hope not," said Aunt Ann, "for he sees us eat every day in a very homely fashion, and I am sure if he eats his own dinner, he ought to let other people eat theirs. If I were his wife, and he had any such notions, I would soon starve him into common sense, for if I did not eat I would take care he should not."

"But," said Mr. Sneyd, "he might retire to an hotel, and eat a good supper, in private, as Byron was said to do."

"I should like to see him," said Aunt Ann, "for if he did, he should feel the measure of my wrath when he returned."

"I thank the Fates which separated us then," said Mr. Travers, laughing, "for I am very much afraid I was made to have my own way—unless, indeed, my wife found a very fascinating way of having hers."

"Very well," said Mr. Sneyd, "when you have found your 'second,' tell me, and I will write her an essay on matrimony."

"Which I will privately instruct her to burn," said Mr. Travers, colouring, and yet laughing.

"Trust her," said Mr. Sneyd; "but I shall have time to make my essay while you are looking for perfection. By the bye, I have sometimes thought of embodying that idea in a novel. An over refined man, marrying

a simple, timid woman, and making her believe he thought her perfection, until the poor thing would not know how to look or move; and would, at length, at the end of three volumes, of course, sink not into the grave like 'the Lowly Lady,' but into a perfect inanity."

"You are very obliging," said Mr. Travers, and, perhaps, some thoughts on the past made him wince; for he suffered the conversation to flow past him without taking any further part in it. Although Mr. Sneyd had declared it to be his intention to return at an early hour to his hotel, the time slipped almost insensibly away, and it was twelve o'clock before he rose to take his leave, all parting in that perfect harmony which left the hope that the short acquaintance might be renewed.

Mr. Travers accompanied him to his hotel, having declared his intention of sleeping there, as he should probably sit up talking

with his friend, and he did not wish to disturb Mrs. Daventry's household by keeping any one waiting up for him.

Margaret retired to rest with a sense of depression weighing upon her mind, which after the agitation of the afternoon was not strange. But there was a new cause working now, which left that past sorrow far in shadow.

As she sat by her open window, the night air passed her lightly, occasionally stirring the leaves of the creeper which twined about her window. Sleeping in the fitful moonlight was the old church, backed by the rising hills; and bright and clear, studding the ground in close groups, lay the white grave stones, looking all in lighter contrast as seen through the tall elms which ornament the croft, and standing out beside the deep shadow cast by the church itself.

Why as she leaned her head upon her hand, and looked out, did she feel such a

sad sinking of her spirits, depressing all her natural strength? Few hearts feel so quickly as those which are beginning to love, and Margaret knew that through that long evening Mr. Travers was changed.

He had not once spoken to her in the kindly tone which had before marked his address. It is true he had taken up her remarks when forced to do so by the necessities of the conversation; but there had been no sign of admiration, or interest in look or tone of voice.

It was true, as Mr. Sneyd's words had lightly spoken it, his wife now could only be his "second." Married as it might seem for convenience, not his first and only choice; but though those words had struck home, and cut deep, her heart overleapt them all, and remembered nothing fully, but that he was changed, strangely reserved, a mere acquaintance.

She knew now how she had treasured his

attentions, and one by one, as from a closely locked store-house, she drew them forth words—looks—silence—eagerly sought companionship; and as she measured each with quick suspicion, the thought which she tried to set aside, forced itself forwards at length. It was as Richard had said, he was skilled in that mental admiration which never touched his own heart — as skilled in withdrawing it when his over refinement suggested a reason. And she had believed him one of Nature's own nobility—stamped with a mark which elevated him above others—elevated him so far that she had been willing to forget his disadvantages; and she knew them to be such, and give to him, what—with a woman's true prerogative, self-reliance—she felt to be a jewel of rich price—her whole heart!

That day she had felt that she was unworthy of him; but not now, looking out into the night, the conventionalities of the

world disappeared, and she felt that no fault of others could ever really lower her, and that the heavy measure of suffering which she had endured, had in reality raised and elevated her spirit.

In taking a common sense view of the question, the disadvantages upon his side overbalanced hers, and like all women she was glad to think so—she would not forget this now. It helped to give her that independence of feeling which in all intercourse of this nature ought to exist upon both sides.

How many women can sympathize with her present mood! How many can remember the balance in which they, too, have weighed looks and words and tones, and wondered how they could have been so weak as to accept them as evidence of what they now suspect to be no truth!

Wearily the church clock noted the passing of time; but Margaret bowed her

head, and not in anger, not in sullenness, but in deep humility, and in something even beyond this, a strong hope and reliance in the Providence, by which each minute event of her destiny was directed, accepted this sorrow as she had done many more. It touched her alone, she would meet it with that real spirit which is drawn only from real resignation.

CHAPTER VI.

FIRM in her resolution to be in this moment of unexpected difficulty true to herself, Margaret went down the next morning, calm and strong. Not again would she listen to that strangely intellectual being, whose mind she felt was enchaining hers, and whose least word had given an interest which she had never before recognized. She would not blame him, she would only put him aside and forget him. Ah! Margaret, is it so easy to forget? Already

you are listening for his step, and, even now, you are grateful to the man who has laid his knife and fork upon the table, and has not taken it for granted that he will breakfast at the hotel.

"These clever men have so much to talk about, that they will be sure to breakfast together," says Aunt Ann; and her supposition proves correct, for the breakfast is over, and the morning passes on, and he does not make his appearance.

"He will take his walk in all probability, and not come in until dinner-time," says Aunt Ann, and how like a bird of ill omen does she appear!

Then Margaret knew, that even in the resignation and forgetfulness which she had deemed so perfect, a hope had lingered that the morning would contradict the night.

But the morning is gone, and the sultry afternoon is come, and Aunt Ann, who hates "moping in of a day," proposes to

go shopping, as it is too warm for the parade.

But the heavy languor which oppresses her, makes Margaret excuse herself, and say that she will go anywhere in the evening, if she may stay at home now, and copy the song for Olivia, which Miss Anstruther had lent her. As it is Liberty Hall she is allowed to do as she wishes, only Aunt Ann cannot offer to give up her shopping, as she has a thousand things to buy, (Margaret wondering what in any shop in the town there can be left for her to purchase) and so starts off with Miss Anstruther to visit half the shops in Hastings, and to talk of Richard in the intervals between each. The one so feverish and talkative, the other so full of repose, surely they must manage to agree, even though the heat is so excessive, that any ordinary tempers would be tried by an exposure to it.

But Margaret is not thinking of them as she goes into the shady room, which is termed the study, (for want of a better name, perhaps, for there are no books in it), and while she takes out her music-paper, and puts the song before her, so that she may copy it easily, she is musing still, and even while bending over the paper, and marking down with practised accuracy each note, she scarcely heeds these, or knows the words she is writing. There is nothing to tease, or interrupt her, the air is still and nothing disturbs the sense of quiet weariness which is in her mind, and hanging like a load every where. She feels then that even the gnats of Silvio Pellico might sometimes be welcome.

Like Tennyson's 'Marianne.' She is 'aweary, aweary,' but she does not wish, that 'she were dead.' So long as those who are dearer to her than life depend upon her

mind for strength, she is content, nay, she is glad to live; and yet she is very weary, and thinks of a time when duty well done, and those she loves safe, she may go home. She thinks now, she will not find rest until then, and that the gladsomeness of spirit, which has sprung up afresh of late has died out, and will never wake again.

So she continues thinking, and yet her hand goes on mechanically. It is a joyous song she has chosen, full of light melodies and bird-like cadences, well suited to Olivia's youthful voice; and Margaret, in a happier mood, and after a pleasant talk with Mr. Travers upon the effect of outward things upon the low spirited, had resolved to introduce it into Starborne Street. How little did it seem now in tune with her own thoughts, and yet it was easier to carry out an old intention, than to create a new one. Olivia would

be pleased, and so she continued to write. Then Margaret began to muse upon what is usually termed in common parlance 'a disappointment,' and to think how it would act upon her, and to remember how she had noticed changes in others, and speculated upon their cause. Would it change her? Did she care enough for Mr. Travers, to remember him long? The acquaintance had been so short, that she must soon forget him, and if not, she would rise from this spirit's trial, with '*a nobler purpose and with a high aim,*' and sinking her own individual hopes and fears, she would live again a better life, in which self should be negatived; or would it be that that self would become stamped with more importance, when darkened by trial, and would a fretful spirit, a complaining, weary mind, a restless discontent go back with her to Starborne Street, to turn her poor home into something more irremediably

unhappy? Oh, no! impossible, it was *Home*, she accepted and loved it as such to-day, and almost longed to hide herself in it. The strong and powerful love which lay so deep in her heart, as to be the moving spring of her actions, could not thus be suddenly broken away, and Margaret murmured to herself, "I am weary now, but to-morrow I will be strong."

In this manner, the afternoon wore on, and buried thus in her own dreams, she heard no sound until the door quickly opened, and Mr. Travers walked in alone. Her pulse quickened, and a joy in his coming which she could not after all her moralising extinguish, made itself felt. Already the day's sorrow was passing in the light of his presence, but she greeted him quietly, and with no sign of pleasure, as she continued her work with more attention than heretofore, though she knew

well that he crossed the room, and with the pretence of looking at the song, was standing behind her.

There was a long silence, which partly because it suited her present mood, and partly because she was determined that he should be the first to speak, she would not break. At length he said, in a voice which trembled, though there was such a strong touch of sarcasm about it:

"When may Miss Hamilton's friends be permitted to congratulate her?"

"Congratulate me!" said Margaret, with a slight touch of surprise, though she did not raise her eyes.

"Perhaps I am venturing upon forbidden ground," said Mr. Travers.

"I do not understand you," said Margaret, gently.

"Women never will understand."

"You must except me then," said Margaret, "for I would if I could. I certainly am not

aware of any subject for congratulation, if you have any I shall be only too glad to hear it, for I parted with good fortune a long way back upon the road."

"And have not found it again yet?" said Mr. Travers.

"No."

"Oh! this is trifling," he exclaimed, so impatiently that Margaret looked up to see if he were in earnest. His face was very pale, but he was looking down at her so fixedly, that she turned her face away again, and continued to write.

"You think me impertinent, Miss Hamilton?"

"It is impossible that Mr. Travers could ever be so," said Margaret coldly; "you wrong yourself by the fancied imputation."

"Eccentric then," said Mr. Travers, "but if you knew how a little act of yours had puzzled, had—had tormented me, you would not mind explaining it."

Margaret turned suddenly pale, and her head bowed slightly. How terrible it is to have a real secret, like the miser of Aristophanes, everything becomes to the possessor a motive for suspicion. Rallying herself, at length, even beneath his watchful eyes, she said with a voice which trembled slightly,

"Ask me any question you like, if I cannot answer it, I will not."

"The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" said Mr. Travers, attempting to laugh off his own eagerness.

"I do not say that," said Margaret, "I am not in a court of justice you know."

"You say there is no cause for congratulation," said he, "but, but—"

"Well," said Margaret, seeing his evident hesitation.

"I saw one of the maids," he said, more hurriedly, "give Mr. Daventry a note from you yesterday morning."

"She did so," said Margaret, "and quite

openly or you would not have seen it. Pray," she added, lightly, "tell me what interpretation this received in your imaginative mind."

"That you were engaged, or about to be so," said Mr. Travers, impressively.

Margaret bent her head still further forward, and was silent from the overpowering impulse which joyously whispered, "His estrangement was but jealousy." Then conscious that her silence would be misinterpreted, she said quietly.

"You are quite mistaken, there is no engagement between us arranged or contemplated. I merely took that opportunity of answering a request of his which I did not wish personally to refuse, for fear of making him angry; but he is my cousin, you know, and I have known him from a child."

"And the request?" said Mr. Travers.

"Is Richard's secret, not mine."

"True, true, how strangely I forget myself; but I thank you very much."

He did not say wherefore, but threw himself as if relieved into an arm-chair near. There were words which should have followed this strange dialogue, as Margaret's blushing cheek and trembling manner certified, but they were not spoken. On the contrary, he took up a book, and began studiously to read for about half an hour. When, at length, he laid it down, suffering some passage in it to suggest a first remark, he carried on the conversation with the intellectual eloquence which always made him, when he pleased, so agreeable. If it was his intention to remove her timidity, and to restore the tone of confidential intercourse which had grown up between them, he was completely successful.

The reserve of the last twenty-four hours melted away as the fog in the noon-day sun, and Margaret found that her good resolutions were gone with it. None but those

who have truly loved, know the weakness or the strength of an affectionate heart. The last hour of the afternoon now passed as rapidly as the first hours had been slow. Margaret, whose mind was always free to discuss the great or the imaginative, had already forgotten herself in the interest of the topics which he had brought forward. So easy, too, had been the flow of conversation, and so unconstrained the exchange of sentiment, that it had not at all assumed the character of a *tête-à-tête*, at least as far as that word is generally understood. And yet, when voices were heard in the garden, and Aunt Ann's presence rustled along the passages, she was sorry. Mr. Travers rose at this instant, and approaching her held out his hand, exclaiming with evident feeling,

"I was foolish and wrong. Will you forgive me?"

She placed her hand frankly in his, and

he putting his other upon it, pressed it gently and reverently. Then turning hastily away, he hurried from the room. But Aunt Ann was not coming that way, and Margaret had time to think over the wayward conduct of him, whom she had promised to regard always as her friend. At that moment the words of Richard would suggest themselves, casting an unpleasant doubt over conduct, which needed to have but the simplest construction put upon it, to be understood. Richard would have said, probably, had he been by, that Mr. Travers had been clever enough to make himself interesting without committing himself by explanations, which are sometimes unsafe. Casting the unpleasant doubt behind her, and yet feeling that it followed her nevertheless, Margaret put aside her music paper, and went up stairs to dress for dinner. She arranged her simple white dress with more than usual care, smoothed down the glossy hair with a

little pardonable vanity, considering that the bright flush upon her cheek was so becoming to her, and placed in front of her dress a bouquet of white and yellow jasmine. Then satisfied with her appearance, as even very modest women feel themselves sometimes to be, she went down stairs to be the very life of the dinner table, and to delight Aunt Ann's heart with her playful wit.

CHAPTER VI.

If Miss Anstruther found the time hang heavily which passed between Sunday, and the evening of the dance which was upon Thursday, she did not say so. She smiled as amiably as if all the world were ministering to her pleasure, and seemed to find much recreation and amusement in deciding which of her various dresses, flowers and jewels should be worn on the occasion. Aunt Ann, meanwhile, noted with quick eye, and satisfied spirit, how in their walks, Mr.

Travers was always by Margaret's side, even to forgetfulness of the little courtesies due to her as his hostess, and when these walks were over, or their loungings by the beach ended, it was marvellous to behold how many last words he found to say, in the little garden which was becoming so dear to them both. So dear, indeed, that before breakfast and after it, waiting for dinner, or resting in the evenings, it seemed to have a powerful temptation for them; and upon these occasions, Miss Anstruther found herself in the way, probably, for she smiled amiably and retired, leaving them to that mysterious intercourse of soul, which, from all time, has been, and to all time, shall continue.

Thursday morning came, at last, and Mr. Travers sent Aunt Ann almost into a fever, by persisting in declining to accompany them to the party. He pleaded that he had a large amount of neglected correspondence,

which he should get off his hands by remaining home.

"Three ladies going to a dance alone!" Mrs. Daventry exclaimed at breakfast time, when first made certain that the determination which he had from the first declared, but which she had never believed in, was true.

There was a letter lying upon the table, in Richard's well-known hand, and opening it, she found that, being rather at leisure that week, he intended coming down to Hastings that day, and remaining until Monday.

Always light and inconsistent in her moods, Aunt Ann had been so thoroughly disheartened by the notion of taking her young charges out alone, that she felt in Richard's coming, little beyond the sense of relief it occasioned. Short as had been the time of his absence, she no longer feared his presence. She knew his strong common-sense, and knowledge of the world well,

some thoughts more unselfish, which connected him with Margaret she did not care to know. That common sense would prevent his appearing as the forsaken lover in the presence of Mr. Travers, and the feelings we learn to conceal, Aunt Ann believed are soon forgotten.

He had met Margaret often, he had almost as often, seemed upon the eve of a declaration, that declaration delayed, had cost him little, and must cost him as little now. At all events, she would wait and not vex herself, until she was forced to do so. Having arrived at this conclusion, during the time occupied by eating a piece of dry toast, she joined in the conversation which was going on with renewed zest. During the day, however, she became more thoughtful. In truth, poor Aunt Ann's schemes were increasing so fast, that they began to hustle each other in her brain.

After luncheon, she retired to her room,

where, just taken from the milliner's box, she found the dress which she had ordered for Margaret. It was of fine Indian muslin, made as simply, but as fashionably as possible, and was as little really in keeping with the pockets of the inhabitants of Starborne Street, as the condemned silk; but it suited her notions of economy, and nothing could be more simple, or more classical, certainly. As Mr. Travers had failed, there still remained the susceptible heart of young Mortham. But Richard! What of him?

Our oldest and commonest proverbs, those which from use have become the most hackneyed, are, perhaps, the truest, and it is very true that "None are so deaf as those who won't hear."

Aunt Ann utterly refused to hear anything of Richard, her son, her dear, dear son, as she often fondly termed him.

Margaret's sorrow at this unnecessary in-

dulgence of her aunt's fitful generosity, was too genuine to permit the pleasure she would otherwise have felt in the exquisite dress which had been chosen for her. To wear this in the indulgence of her own vanity, as it appeared to her while she remembered her home, seemed almost an insult to it. And could the dress have been converted again into money, no urgency would have been spared to prevail upon her aunt to withdraw the costly gift. But as this could not be, she hid her pale face and tearful eyes on Mrs. Daventry's shoulder, and murmured her incoherent thanks.

But these Aunt Ann well knew were not the words of gratified beauty, and of foreknowledge of conquest, which she had longed to hear, and troubled by her niece's quiet tears; she said pettishly,

"You are not pleased after all, then? You are so philosophical that nothing moves you."

"Your affection does indeed move me, dear aunt; but oh! you ought not to spend so much money upon me. I ought not to be so extravagant, remembering those at home."

"Yes! remembering them, you ought," said her aunt a little mollified, "for if you get married, there will be one mouth less to feed at home."

Margaret was silenced. This was an idea of marriage she did not like to take, lest for one moment it might influence her; and these allusions of her aunt to their actual necessity, seemed ill-timed and inconsistent when so carelessly uttered, amidst the wealth which everywhere surrounded her, and made her life a constant feast. But she banished these thoughts as far as she was able, and by her judicious praise of the delicate texture of the dress, and the perfect fashion of its make, she succeeded in restoring her flexible relative to her accustomed good humour.

Miss Anstruther was called in, and thrown into despair with her own pink glacé silk with its five flounces, which, as contrasted with the white muslin, she denounced with more ill-humour than she had yet shewn. But it was quiet undemonstrative ill-humour, which shewed itself only by a darkness overspreading her face, and which presently passed away as if by some imperceptible effort of self-control.

Richard Daventry did not arrive until the ladies had gone up to dress for the party, and consequently found no one to welcome him but Mr. Travers. He was writing letters at a side table in the dining-room; but he left them to greet the son of his hostess, and to discuss the latest London news, while the latter ate his dinner, which, composed of the most delicate viands, had been carefully ordered and thought over by his mother, who believed

that she could consider no trouble too great, no sacrifice a hardship, where this beloved son was concerned. No sacrifice, poor mother, perhaps, except the very one which alone would truly benefit him.

The dinner over, Richard hastened to change his dusty habiliments, for others more fitting the presence of ladies. When he was gone, Mr. Travers sank back in the arm-chair in which he was sitting, holding in one hand the crumpled copy of the 'Times,' which Richard had brought with him, and which during their dialogue he had been carefully endeavouring to straighten; so sitting and watching the door through which he had passed, he thus moralized.

"He is a younger man than I am, and quite as good looking as I ever was. He is richer than I, if report be correct by many safe thousands. He is a single man, and his cousin is probably his first choice,

while I am a *widower*. The world acknowledges me to be talented, but it reckons him also wise in its own wisdom. A talented man, that is, perhaps, a literary man, is in temper testy, in requirements exacting. They say poor Mary was not a happy wife. It was my fault, perhaps, yet more the fault of my nature than of my will; and my second wife might fare no better. But a man who possesses unshackled wealth, and but common ability as Richard does, might do better; nay! he would, he must. A woman of spirit would have her own way with little effort. And yet he is no fool, and I can fancy his winning his way to a woman's heart. It is true, every advantage is upon his side, and nothing can strike the balance in my favour but *love*."

As he reached this last thought, his eyes flashed with excitement, it pleased him, it carried him away; he turned to it again

and again; sated with popular adulation, he had felt wearied with paying attentions which were too easily answered, but here was a real prize in view, which satisfied all the craving of a too restless heart.

Just then the door again opened, and this time it was not Richard but Margaret herself who entered.

The light folds of the soft white muslin, swept lightly round her tall and queenlike figure, and spoke only as Aunt Ann had intended of perfect simplicity of taste. Two small white feathers were fastened in her black hair, with green leaves which were spangled with dewy brilliancy, in close imitation of the ice plant, and added to the cool repose of her dress. In rich contrast to both were the dark folds of her glossy hair, the rich deep colour of her cheeks, and the sparkling *life* which flashed from her eyes, or danced in smiles upon her lips, every feature of her beauty speaking

of the intellect which, waking or slumbering, was there without the shadow of a doubt.

Mr. Travers, sitting in the arm-chair, was still in morning dress, which the irregular hour of dinner had permitted. Was there any intention, any wilfulness in thus placing himself in contrast?

She came in the trustful manner which was so winning in her, so dear to him; and sat down at the table waiting for the others.

"You will enjoy a quiet evening all alone," she said smilingly.

"Perhaps I shall," he said, still looking at her, "I seldom go to evening parties when I can avoid them."

"I see so little of society now," she said, "that I find visiting a treat."

"Ah!" he said gravely "our tastes are in contrast as much as our dress; all life is, as I once said, new to you while it is old and tasteless to me."

"For shame then," said Margaret, who had learnt to lecture him quite at her ease now, "a mind like yours should always be so hard at work, that, like the flowers, it should renew its own life, and grow more beautiful year by year."

"Do all flowers grow more beautiful?" said he smiling, "or do they not sometimes deteriorate each year?"

"You are determined to abuse yourself, so pray do; it will be such pleasant occupation for a solitary evening."

"I am afraid," said he, laughing, "the pleasure consists in having you for a listener."

"If it does," she replied in the same light tone, "pray choose a better subject, you who have so many at command. Do you think that I can only understand one, that you bring it up perpetually?"

"I wish to impress it upon you, to prevent you closing your eyes to a fact,

about which your charity would make you blind."

"For what purpose?" said Margaret, looking up with a puzzled air.

"It is sufficient that I have a purpose, and that you may know it some day."

"You are a curious being."

"Is it so curious to be anxious, that you should remember that I am passing year by year from that maturity to which you are from a distant point advancing."

"There are some minds which have no right to grow old," said Margaret, as her eye flashed, "until they sink into the grave of second childhood, and even then they pass only through a cloud to immortality. When I think of the Patriarchs, who were grown men at the same age that men are now, and yet who lived on for hundreds of years, I cannot understand our becoming old."

"But our hair turns grey," said Mr.

Travers, "our bodies stoop, our strength of arm decays, our hands shake, and we are, notwithstanding your philosophical reflections, very old if we reach seventy years of age."

"And yet we should not be old," persisted Margaret, "if we were humble as well as wise; as willing to learn from, as to teach the generation which follows us, and as warm in our sympathies with mankind."

"But we are not," said Mr. Travers.

"Then we ought to be," said Margaret.

"Like all women," said Mr. Travers, smiling, "you drift away from the argument."

"And like all men," said Margaret, "you are too obstinate to follow. Now tell me, what purpose a man of your known and acknowledged standing in the world can have in always abusing yourself."

"I never do but to you."

"To me then?"

"Because," he said, and the light flashed beneath the long lashes which shaded his eyes, "I would have you see me as I am, no better, not now, though there might come a time when I would claim your charity — charity to forget all that I would now impress."

"You who seem to lay such a stress upon youth, do you value it so highly in reality? Would you give up your hard-earned triumphs, to be, say, as young as I am now? for though my sisters believe that I have reached an advanced age, you seem to regard me as a perfect Hebe."

Mr. Travers considered a moment, and then he laughed lightly.

"Why, putting the case in such a form, I really do not think I would."

"Then never utter a repining word on this subject again," said Margaret, with good-humoured decision, "and if another motive

is required, I dislike it, it is painful to me."

"Why—why?"

"Because it is. I am so accustomed to have my own way, that you will obey me, I am sure."

"Obey—ha! ha! Rather reversing the order of things, is it not?"

"Oh, dear no! the laws of chivalry force you to obey any lady."

"A curious and most motley life I should have if I attended to them then!"

"Never mind!" said Margaret, laughing, "for I fear women are too often afraid to exercise their privilege."

"And you?"

"Am not afraid; that is all."

"No, I know you are not, that is why I like you," said he simply, and in so low a tone that Margaret did not think it necessary to reply.

A silence followed, why, either would have found it difficult to explain, but once when Margaret raised her eyes, she saw in his face such a look of perfect happiness and contentment, that she could not help feeling a little angry that he should be so pleased when she was going away.

"How many conquests do you mean to make to-night?" he said at length.

"Only one," she replied.

"And that one?" he said, rather, only *rather* quickly.

"Over myself."

Mr. Travers leaned back, while the slight flush upon his face brightened, and his lip quivered as he inquired further.

"What in?"

"Because I am just a little angry that you should be so glad to get rid of us."

"Are you really angry, angry with me for that?" he said, his affected listlessness thrown away, and bending forward, his whole

features flashed forth excitement, and then starting from his chair, he would have lessened the distance between them, but at that moment, the door opened, and placid, serene, well-dressed, and in perfect repose, but with just a little smile of vanity upon her lip, Miss Anstruther entered the room, and Mr. Travers sunk back, pale, and seemingly almost exhausted by the strong effort he made to tranquillize himself.

CHAPTER VII.

His temporary excitement subdued, Mr. Travers sat still, leaning back and regarding the scene around him as if he had had no part in it. He watched the dignified simplicity of Margaret's manner, recovering its perfect self-possession without the slightest affectation or attempted diversion, with feelings of wondering admiration, for apart as it was, from shyness or indifference, it stimulated his interest, and made him more regret the interruption, which had prevented his rashness

from overstepping the bounds laid down by his better judgment. In the same half-dreamy consciousness, he watched the fluttering entrance of Aunt Ann, noted each heavy fold of her green satin dress, and each article of jewellery which adorned her. In this mood he took in, more than all, the quick thoughts, and wordly speculations, displayed in her scrutinizing glances at her niece, and he saw well that the little ambition of her mind found in that moment, at least, no satisfaction in his admiration, disgraced as it was by a shooting jacket, for sitting there in Margaret's quiet grace she was very lovely indeed, not lovely only, but radiant in his eyes.

Presently the group had another addition by Richard's entrance, and Mr. Travers leant his head upon his hand, and regarded him earnestly from the retreat of his arm chair, which he had now rolled back further from the light. He saw the look of admiration he gave his cousin as they met; but more, he

perceived also, that the quick blood mounted to Margaret's brow, and that though trying to be cordial, her nerve had failed, and watching her, the colour passed from his own face and left it ashy pale.

Richard Daventry looked very well too, having the air of a man well to do, satisfied with his own plans, and reliant upon his own powers; but there was more even than this that night, there was in his face and all about him the brightness and elasticity of that love which is confident of success, but not too certain to have lost its interest. Moreover, the way in which he stood by Margaret, and so evidently seemed to regard her as his own possession, was irritating in the extreme.

A bouquet of splendid, really splendid flowers had been offered, and she had accepted it with the same attempt to appear very open and frank, which attempt had failed as signally as that of her first greeting had done.

As Richard bent his head to talk in tones which could not reach even the acute ears of Mr. Travers, the latter acknowledged that they looked, at least, well matched, and at that moment Richard had all the advantage of a fashionable and gentlemanly toilet in his favour. He knew that he had been too proud to enter the lists with one whom, to himself, he termed "a younger man," but his pride failed to support him now, and his spirit writhed when he felt that Richard really had the advantage of him. Then the voice of conscience forced itself upon his unwilling ear, and whispered, "What right have you, if she loves you, to mortify her vanity by disdaining the little graces which all women value so much, and if she is only now beginning to balance your merits, will you lose, by your eccentricity, such a peerless gem by forcing her to believe that you do not think her worth the winning?"

Soon, very soon, and yet those few minutes

had seemed like hours, the little party passed from the room, and Margaret (hurried out on Richard's arm, Miss Anstruther and the watching Aunt following) had said but a good night, which was only "good night," and carried with it no peaceful thought or loving message to his soul.

Then he dropped his face upon his hands, to shut out the peering inquisitive moon which was looking in upon him through the long old fashioned windows. "Margaret my love, my life!" he exclaimed, in the bitterness which was gathering round his heart, "must I lose you; the only one who ever entered the depths of my soul; and I—how through these years have I longed to love as I knew I could love, and to meet you now, when the accidents of life are against me. But a few years ago, and nothing should have parted us, I would have won you, I must have done so; but now! it is too late, a strong friendship you entertain for me, indeed, but can anything short of

the love I feel, satisfy me? No, I have been right, I must know and be assured you do really love me; or, better as it is—"

He tried to calm himself, tried to rouse himself to order lights, but he could not. He must walk down by the sea. He took his hat and went forth, and soon found himself upon the almost deserted shore. Here he sat down upon the pebbles, and tried to regain his old habit of philosophising. It would not do. The moon was playing with silver spangles upon the water; but he watched only as one whose thoughts take no colour from present objects.

The restless sea poured wave after wave against the pebbly shore in ever ceaseless monotony, telling their lesson audibly, that so the waves of life roll over the sands of time, and wash out past memories and impressions; but he heard it not, there was a sound thrilling in his ear above that of the restless ocean, or the breath of the

night wind, and that sound was ever, "Margaret! Margaret!"

How could he let her go, and she a woman, into such a scene of gaiety with such a companion, and the impression that he was too indifferent to endure an evening party for her sake. Yet if she were simply a woman, and not rendered to him of countless price by the single attribute of love, what signified it? If she were this priceless gem, she would return, and to-morrow would be as to-day. This was true, he told himself that it was true, and yet he could not rest. He turned from the sea, and took his way back again towards the country. He was a rapid walker, and he got over the ground almost imperceptibly. He had reached the heights, and struck across the downs. The feeling that he was quite alone pleased and soothed him. The hush of nature was complete, every thing about him spoke of repose; far away the sea was

sleeping, and in fancy, though scarcely in that dim light, in reality, the eye could detect the line of the French coast. He had lost sight even of the lamps of the town; and still he went on, satisfied with the wild and barren downs, spreading every where around him, and giving an air of desolation which seemed like sympathy. He sat down again, and thought, looking back upon his life, and the past sprang up in review before him. He had married very early, when only twenty one. His wife had been his own cousin. The marriage had been much desired by his parents, for she was their ward, and an orphan of large fortune. He had been from childhood much attached to her, for at home she had been his only companion; but the idea of marriage had never occurred to him, and being of a reserved disposition no one had ventured to speak of it. It happened, however, that by one of those strange accidents

which sometimes befall us, he learned that what in him had been meant but for brotherly courtesy and affection, had been treasured up by her as the witness of a dearer feeling. This affection of hers was developed and quickened by the jealousy caused by witnessing his transient admiration of another girl. Finding her one day weeping, writing on a scrap of paper, and blotting it with her tears as she wrote, he entreated, and then insisted upon knowing the cause of her distress. There had been no secrets between them, and he had dreamed of no mischief, when he took possession of the paper, on which were written those few blotty lines. It was no difficult task with a hand so strong as his, so weak as hers; and while she clung frantically to his arm trying to wrench it from him, he held up that arm far above her head, and read.

Their eyes met: did the despairing lines apply to himself? There could be

but one thought when he looked at her, her head bent down like the rose which seems to blush at its own loveliness. He had but a moment's hesitation, and then folding his arms round her, he breathed in her glad ear, the love which rose, but, alas! died also in an hour.

They were married very soon, for he was anxious to give himself no time to repent, for he calculated that once man and wife, all would be well. But poor Mary who, with more than an usual amount of feeling, had less than usual common sense, soon tormented herself and him, knowing perhaps too well that the affectionate and patient kindness he displayed, was not really all he had to give. There lies an untravelled country, which she could never reach, and instead of sending to spy out this land, loving messengers to tell of untiring love; unflinching self-denial; patient, persevering kindness; high

and holy resolutions, which would in time have joyfully heralded her presence in this unknown country, she sat down at its entrance, and wept!

Perhaps of all men in the world, Mr. Travers was the very last to be won by tears. He did his best, but it fretted the sore part of his own destiny to be reminded always of what he would willingly have forgotten.

His temper was not bad, but it soon became testy, and though for every hasty word he uttered, he experienced hours of after repentance, Mary took those testy words, and made them into a quarrel, for she found no delight or interest any where, but in him, and so watched for his words and looks, until the least shadow upon his brow was interpreted, as meaning some dissatisfaction with herself. He often questioned himself whether he had been wrong, but never was completely satisfied.

The sacrifice he now knew that he had made, he felt to have been futile, but to have put her aside in that moment, when by his own wilfulness he had found out her secret, would as he judged by himself, have been humiliation unto death. So he tried to submit to circumstances, and to forget himself, and remembering only that Mary was right, and that he did not love her as he might, he charged it to his account as a fault, and atoned to her for it as he could.

Having a fortune ample enough for his wishes, upon the death of his parents, which followed soon after his marriage, he turned his attention to literature, and by steady perseverance, developed the brilliant talents he possessed, and thus made for himself the name he now enjoyed.

The society with which he mingled, and the interests he made for himself, became a new source of uneasiness to his wife.

Whether it was that fretfulness acted upon a weak constitution, or her naturally diseased frame produced fretfulness, it is difficult to decide, but after a few years of uneasy married life, the fatal English malady developed itself, and she was pronounced to be in a decline.

Her husband then reproached himself with all the depth and violence of a sensitive and poetic mind. He threw aside every pursuit which had not her for its object, and devoted to her alone his time and thought. Everything which change could effect, or money purchase, was tried for her, and when all was done, and all had failed, he gave up the whole energy of that talent which had been employed in the improvement and amusement of nations, to that one frail being, to support her strength, and elevate her character.

For this devotion he was rewarded by the certainty that she was satisfied at last,

that she depended upon him for everything, and found her strength and happiness through him, and in his lessons of deeper thought and holier expectation. Perhaps, he then believed that this being so dependent upon his affection and kindness could never be replaced; but truth asserts itself, truth of feeling is almost certain to do so.

The grave closed, and he shut himself up in that desolate spirit which some men are so prone to feel, and believed that earthly interest was gone from him for ever. But this could not last. In her days of health, his wife had never satisfied his mind, and old interests into which she had never entered, returned, and he again awakened to that strong sense of vitality, which had before marked his genius. Yet, mingling with this, and stealing over everything, was the shadow of the past, and heard through all the years which followed, was the voice

of memory, like the echo of some sad sound.

There was a want in his heart, ever felt there unless forgotten amidst the press of business, or the labours of his pen. That want was not, perhaps, so much of any actual thing, but it was experienced, because some feelings had never been called into action, some powers within his heart had never been exercised.

Many may speak slightingly of "love," so much so, that one hesitates to write the word in its abstract meaning. But why should we give it up into the hands of sentimentalists. It is a high and holy attribute, viewed in its most elevated sense. That sentiment has more, perhaps, in its widely extended influence, the power of raising or lowering the spirit than any other. Ambition, learning, philanthropy, and other passions of the mind in particular persons, have exercised more power and shewn more effect,

but it is not so widely extended as is that of love, which has shewn, and will shew its power from, and to all time; in the king upon his throne, the artizan in his workshop, and the beggar in the street.

Turn to the lives of great men, and we find that this passion has raised or lowered them; for though some one has said that love is woman's business but man's plaything, we believe he may find it a very serious plaything indeed, very much as fire may be, the source of amusement, or the element of destruction.

Look at Lord Eldon bringing out the powers of his mind, and taming his impatient spirit down to work which seemed to bring no reward, urged on by the love of one who had given her happiness to his keeping.

Turn to a different picture, and England blushes to behold the one stain resting indelibly on the name of her proudly cherished Nelson.

Look again, and what sadder picture can history furnish than that of the cloud left by the discarded Josephine upon the path of a Napoleon. Nay, the power of loving with strong devotion is the attribute of man, and there is a vacancy in that heart which has never loved, unless filled with a devotion which leaves earth entirely behind it.

This vacancy Mr. Travers had felt, but he felt it no longer, in the loneliness of that night he knew that though what he termed the accidents of life were against him, he loved with all the intensity of his nature. Presently he rose up again and went on, and whether he gave any direction to his steps or not, it would have been difficult for himself to have told, but after a little further walking, a break in the downs brought him upon one of those pictures which in our native scenery are so pleasant to behold. Sheltered by the hills from the wind upon every side but the one which faced the south, stood a large and

rather straggling country residence surrounded by gardens, which were interspersed by many fine trees. It was very evidently the home of a gentleman wanting in no comfort which moderate wealth, directed by good taste, could afford; and when Mr. Travers found himself suddenly before it, the scene presented to him, appeared not so much that of a wealthy English house, as of a fairy dwelling place.

Lights were streaming from all the lower windows, and flitting to and fro above, and merry music, timed to the fall of some rapid measure, burst upon his ear. As if rejoicing in the certainty of the extreme loneliness of the situation, everything about the house was open and unguarded, while the strong power of its many lights threw the rest of the country into shadow. Mr. Travers was in a restless melancholy humour, and he found a pleasure in standing aside and feeling quite alone, while he listened to the hum of many voices, and the light laughter which sometimes

stole upon his ear. The windows of the dancing room were opened to the ground, and were used as doors by the waiters who carried refreshments, or by those who wished more easily to reach another end of the crowded room. He drew himself close to the light railings which alone protected the gardens, and placed himself in the shadow of an American Oak, the branches of which cast a darkness round in rich contrast to the light of the moon without, or the glare of lamps from within.

Was this Mr. Mortham's house, and was Margaret here? If so he must, he would catch sight of her before he went away. He was just deliberating how he might approach the windows unseen, when the music ceased in the usual abrupt manner, and the dancers poured forth from doors and windows into the gardens, laughing, talking, philosophising, and coquetting, each according to his nature, each couple

taking their several ways. One only came towards him. How beautiful she loooked in her snowy robe, and the white cloak wrapped about her shoulders; but she was pale as the silver moon riding above her in the blue vault of Heaven, he trembled violently as she approached towards him, and leant heavily upon the iron rails for support, from the sudden faintness which threatened to prostrate him. There was an expresssion upon her countenance which he could not understand, but he knew well how to read the eyes which were seeking hers with such intensity of meaning, for it was upon Richard's arm she leant, as they came slowly down the sloping walk which no other had cared to choose. Richard was bending down, was talking in those low tones, with that interest and excitement which developes graces and feelings, seen, perhaps, only at such times in life, and Margaret might well measure

this earnestness with his own indifference to her pleasure, and find him wanting. As they advanced still nearer, Margaret looked up and seemed to remonstrate with earnestness, but Richard's reply reached him as they passed.

"Margaret, you know I love you, why will you not believe me?"

The increasing faintness which oppressed him, prevented his hearing her answer, and then they were gone, and nothing was left but the receding echoes of their footsteps.

He staggered back, and sinking down by the tree, tried to collect his thoughts and to waken his strength. That past crisis in his own life, how distinctly he had that night recalled it, with every tone and thought and incident which had marked it. Unshielded by his love for any other, he had yielded to the call of friendship and pity. Why should it not be so with Margaret? Why should she be stronger than he had been? He felt

inclined to pursue her, to fall at her feet to beg her to reconsider her decision before she uttered it. To think of herself, first of all in this matter, aye in pure pity to her cousin, to think of herself. Yes, yes—not a thought of himself, he could give himself up in that moment as he had done before; but not her, he knew what his past life had been, he could not give her up to such a one. But she might love Richard truly, deeply and devotedly after all, and her words to him might only have been in defence of a secret, which a woman guards with her life.

The big drops stood upon his forehead, and rising from the ground upon which he had thrown himself, he staggered onwards upon the way back to the Croft.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT a long evening that had proved. Mr. Travers reached home again, seated himself by the table from which he had risen some hours before, and placing his long arrear of letters before him, began mechanically to write, and yet there was no sign of the returning vehicle which he looked for, and yet dreaded. Letter after letter was written, true to its necessary purpose, and clear and lucid as usual in style, but without one of those flashes of wit or merri-

ment which ordinarily made his most important letters interesting, and which at the expense of himself or of others, were alike genial, stirring and acceptable. A feeling of lethargy had succeeded excitement, but in this lethargy, as in the activity of the sleep-walker, he quietly and methodically pursued his self-appointed task. The night was very sultry, and attracted by the clear light, shining from his candle through the window, the night insects flapped against its panes, and the whirl of the bat from without caused him to look up sometimes, and then as if some uneasy thought had been re-awakened, he would pass his hand across his brow, sigh heavily, and resume his writing.

There is a nobility in some natures, which sorrow but the more refines and exalts, and had a painter sat and watched him then, he would, knowing the changes of the human features, have delighted himself

by seeing how entirely that grief was exalting him, and bringing him out of himself. There was a gentleness stealing over the too sarcastic spirit, a look which spoke as much of humility as of strength.

He continued writing, and when the door bell rang at length, and the carriage stopped before the gate, he quietly rose and walked to the door before the sleepy servant had roused herself to open it.

How sweetly scented was the night air as he walked through the little garden he had loved so well. Opening the gate he prepared to hand the ladies out. Richard descended first, of course, but without, waiting to assist him, and making some remark in passing upon his being up so late, he left him and went on to the house.

Mr. Travers was grave, very grave as he helped out the tired ladies, but when he took the hand of Margaret who was the

last, he drew it within his arm with a tenderness and respect, which was intended to minister to her feelings whether of joy or sorrow. He knew that the hand trembled which rested upon his arm, and that she was so languid and weary, that he felt inclined to take her in his strong arms and carry her in, and so he led her gently, as he would have done a tired child.

When the light fell upon her from the candle, which the awakened servant now brought forward, he saw that perhaps under cover of the dark drive home, she had been weeping, and that her eyes were swollen with tears. Whether they had misunderstood each other, and so quarrelled, he did not stop to ask himself; he simply saw that she was greatly moved; and aiding her with intuitive skill, he placed the light in her hand, and allowed her to depart without being noticed, and without a word being spoken upon either side.

He then turned to listen to Mrs Daventry, who, tired as she was, respected him sufficiently to believe herself forced in politeness to keep her eyes open, while she told him the whole and particular account of the ball, which had very much pleased her.

The earnest attention and grave interest with which he listened, quite charmed her sleepiness away, and she soon found herself giving a distinct narration of the gay scene, a part of which he himself had noted so well. They were alone, and therefore she could be as free in her description as she pleased. She gave great zest to the compliments which she had received upon her niece's appearance, and she dilated with particular emphasis and intention upon the way in which she had been beset by young Mortham.

"And you know," she observed, as at length she bade him good night, "in a

party no attentions are of so much value as those of the son of the host, for it gives a girl so much éclat, and that Margaret is sure to receive wherever she goes; but," she added in a tone of confidence, "as for Miss Anstruther, dear girl, she is too much for me, she is delightful and so rich, and all that, but I cannot get her on."

And Aunt Ann fluttered off to bed, leaving him sifting her evidence, as if he were a judge, and she had been in the witness box.

He retired to bed, at length, but he rose the next morning at his usually early hour, and before Margaret's weary eyelids had closed in sleep, he was out again upon the downs. He was communing with himself. He had deeply studied the minds of other men, he would not be ignorant of his own. He was preparing himself to meet a calamity from the power of which he could not fly. He looked upon a great sorrow as a message to the

soul, he wished to be still and hear its meaning. There was a heavy burden upon him, but he was bearing it as one who knows its weight, and is certain that it can never be a heavier tax upon his powers, than he is able to endure. Blessed words to this effect have been written in the Holy Book, and he has not only accepted their truth as a fact, but made them an element of his own strength. He will bear, because he knows that he can bear, and that touched by a heavenly talisman, earth has no sorrow great enough to conquer him, if he be but true to himself.

When after a lengthened walk, he returned to the house, and entered the breakfast-room, he found Richard Daventry, who was cutting open the 'Times' in a sulky manner, and Miss Anstruther, who was making the tea for her dilatory hostess. She evidenced by her calm, placid and

quietly satisfied manner, no symptoms of fatigue, and with the greatest amiability and deference, had evidently been trying to work the silent Richard into good humour. Mrs. Daventry entered soon after, and breakfast proceeded without Margaret's making her appearance.

She, poor girl, felt incapable of exertion, and more disinclined than incapable. On the preceding evening she had been forced to hear Richard's avowal of his affection for her, which was made in a manner which contrasted entirely with his usual self-sufficient coolness. She had never calculated upon his going further than the attentions which he had fitfully shewn her for so many years; and it was when she was trying to keep back his words, and to save his feelings the pain of a refusal, that he had exclaimed,

"Margaret, you know I love you, why will you not believe me?"

The necessity of stating plainly to him that

she could not accept him, had grieved her as much as it had astonished him, and she now sank into a fit of depression from which she was unable to rouse herself. She thought, too, that being a business man, he could so easily plead a necessity for returning to town, and so avoid a meeting until time had healed the wound. When, however, about four o'clock, she discovered still no signs of his departure, she forced herself to go down stairs.

To leave Hastings was, certainly, very obviously the best course for Richard under the circumstances, but though possessed of a large share of worldly wisdom, he was very deficient in tact, and disappointment made him sluggish. So he lingered on through the day, and showed no intention of shortening his stay. Moreover, to annoy and pique Margaret, he took every opportunity of neglecting her, and openly exalting Miss Anstruther's taste, and singing, and conversation.

Margaret knew her cousin well, and this method of retaliation did not surprise her, while it relieved her mind of very much of the compassion and pity which had oppressed her. But Mr. Travers dined out that day, and she did not see him at all, so that through the long dinner, and the still longer evening, there was nothing to counterbalance the open neglect and ill humour of Richard, which, however, she might have defied another night, as she had often done similar fits of temper in days gone by, teased and annoyed her in her present mood. Richard's manner anxiously displayed the fact that with this unlucky episode of his love, closed all the cousinly friendship of years; and that she felt was unnecessary and ungenerous, although she was ready to make every allowance for him. She was sorry, too, to perceive that he was weak enough to be very much pleased by the evident pleasure which Miss Anstruther appeared to have in his con-

versation, and, for the first time, an unpleasant suspicion glanced across her mind, that her new friend's constant placidity, was but a natural cloak to the intrigue of a little mind. Again and again, she tried to think that this suspicion was caused alone by jealousy at the quick disaffection of her admirer, but she was right in believing that she was incapable of such a feeling, though she was not quite proof against the annoyance of knowing that Richard believed it possible. If Miss Anstruther had not detected the actual state of things, she had evidently divined that there was a breach between them, and she took advantage of it to attempt the weakened citadel. Of this much Margaret felt almost certain, and though she was half inclined to be very angry with him, after the grief she had that afternoon wasted upon him, he was still cousin Richard, with whom from childhood she had played and quarrelled, and she did not like witnessing this covert attack not

so much upon his love as his vanity. But Julia Anstruther, while she yielded every opinion to him, and seemed to think it a privilege to wait upon him, met the depressed glance of Margaret with one which was not quite all amiability, and which seemed to say, "Pray do not interfere with my game, for if you do I shall say it is jealousy."

Meanwhile, Aunt Ann's spirits were quite overpowering, and the blinks and nods she gave Margaret were wonderful to behold; poor innocent Aunt Ann, who little knew how her Richard had been employed but the yesternight, and believed all her plans were succeeding, and needed but a gentle touch to bring them to effect. Ah! mother, beware! better, far better, leave him to himself. It was a very trying evening, and Margaret thought it would never come to an end. It began to rain too, and the refuge of the garden, to which she would willingly have retreated, was cut off. The rain made the

room feel cold, and falling steadily made the flowers droop and look soiled, although Aunt Ann, in the excess of her contentment at seeing Richard and the heiress playing chess together, declared it was most welcome and refreshing.

It is not pleasant to feel "a nobody" in any circle, and Margaret was from many other reasons depressed. The sad interests of her home had been awakened that day by a letter from Olivia, which was written in an amusing style, giving a ridiculous account of some late failures in her housekeeping; but like the sad effects of merry bells, Olivia's drollery only awakened in Margaret a gloomy train of thought. She hoped it was only the rain, and that when the sun shone the dark thoughts would go away. Thinking of them, she remembered how sorry her mother would be to learn that she had declined Richard's offer, and all the opportunities thereto accruing of introducing Alice and Olivia, and of getting Fred into something official.

Reflecting in this manner, in her corner of the window recess, she looked up at the chess players, and found that Richard was earnestly regarding her. She turned her eyes to the window, but he had risen from his chair, and with the cheering announcement to Miss Anstruther that her queen was in danger, he left her to get out of the dilemma, while he crossed over to where Margaret was sitting. Bending down so as to reach her ear alone, he said in a tone in which eagerness and satisfaction were curiously blended.

"Do you repent of what you said last night?"

Margaret looked up hurriedly and half frightened, but she said entreatingly,

"Oh Richard! let us forget it as if it were but a dream."

"You do not repent, then," he said, and his manner added, what he was very prone to say, "I like direct answers."

And Margaret answered,

"No."

Richard turned away with a scornful air, which brought back the fear she always had of him at times, although she defied the feeling; and in a few minutes more, he had checked Miss Anstruther's king as well as her queen, and laughing a low laugh in return to her complimentary exclamation, "that nothing could stand before him," had begun another game. Some men, forgetting that thereby they set a seal upon their own discomfiture, believe that they can in no better way assert themselves, when refused by one woman than by hastily marrying another. This notion was evidently in Richard's head that night, and Margaret knew how difficult it was to turn him from a purpose, and yet she longed to try, and much she doubted whether it would be good to interfere, and whether she could succeed if she did.

She had begun of late to mistrust the cat-like amiability of her friend, and this made

her uncomfortable, for she was, though not in love with him, yet despite of his opposition of character, very sincerely attached to her cousin. She watched him now very attentively, and as she did so, she gradually shook off the depression which had too much of self in it, and returned to that intrinsic feeling of self-respect, the sign, not of vanity, but of humility, and true to her purpose, yet almost trembling at it, she looked for her opportunity.

Some people wait all their lives for opportunities, others make them for themselves. Margaret belonged to the latter class of actors, and forced success where others submit patiently or impatiently to failure.

In order fully to understand her present train of thought, it must be remembered that she had known her cousin intimately all her life. When, therefore, as the evening proceeded, she saw him more and more engrossed with Julia Anstruther, the same uneasy

suspicion of her want of sincerity and genuineness increasing, as she watched, and yet no chance of seeing him alone occurring, she resolved that she would somehow speak to him, even if she asked for an interview. As, however, she was meditating upon some pretext for such a request, which she steadily resolved to make, Julia left the room in search of a song, which she had affirmed, she was certain Mr. Daventry could learn with her.

Not a moment was to be lost, as Aunt Ann was also absent, and might return at any moment, and half breathless with anxiety, and yet assuming the air of careless independence, which she knew had most power with him, she moved quickly across the room, and standing by the chess-table, confronted him with an expression containing a somewhat odd mixture of fearlessness and timidity.

"I have a favour to ask, Richard," she said rapidly, "it is that you will go to town to-morrow."

"And why?" said Richard, with a cool but gentlemanly indifference of manner, which would have daunted many.

"Because a man who is acting under the influence of pique is not himself, and you are such a man now."

"You might have had the right to advise with me," said Richard coolly, "but as you have declined that right, it really is scarcely consistent with your usual delicacy of feeling to interfere with my movements."

Margaret heard him finish his slowly enunciated sentence with impatience, every moment dreading an interruption.

"I am not thinking of myself," she then exclaimed, "but do not you, who have so much knowledge of the world, be conquered by a pitiful feeling; you who are in a position

to choose for yourself, do not marry from pique."

He looked surprised, hurt, but cool and gentlemanly as before.

"You think me bold, and so I am," said Margaret, as her eyes flashed with vehemence, "and yet I will speak. Go to town to-morrow, another time, any time but this, if you deem her worthy, shew her the attention you have shewn to-night; but you know you neither love nor care for her now, except to anger me. When in your generosity you overlooked my poverty, and spoke as you did last night, you were like yourself and honored yourself by the words you used, do not disgrace them by this foolish acting now, for if without love you commit yourself, you will repent it, even if Miss Anstruther be the most perfect of woman kind."

"You are jealous!" said Richard coldly.

"I am jealous of your honour, Richard; and by all the kindness you have ever shewn me, by the memory of days gone by, and our happy, happy childhood, grant me, perhaps, the last request I may ever have the courage to make to you, and go to town to-morrow."

Richard sat still, she standing by, while he played with his watch chain deliberately. The door opened, and with the same smiling face and cat-like tread Miss Anstruther entered, she stopped for a moment, just one moment, and the blackness which has before been described, passed over her countenance; but keeping it back and smiling it down, she walked to the piano, and spread the song out, inviting Richard to come. He walked to the piano, glanced over the song, but without any of the zest which had marked his previous conversation, and then pronouncing it to be a third

too high for his voice, lounged back again to the fire-place. Margaret had conquered, and Richard left the next morning by the first train for London.

CHAPTER IX.

"WHAT an eccentric man Mr. Travers is!" said Miss Anstruther on the morning which saw her half-won admirer depart, as she walked with Aunt Ann upon the esplanade, which is half in Hastings, half in St. Leonard's, when Margaret glad to be alone, had passed on to the craggy beach, where she knew her Aunt would not follow her. This was the afternoon of Saturday. Richard had left that morning,

and Miss Anstruther as she walked on, taking quick short steps to keep pace with her restless companion, shewed no sign of chagrin or disappointment, which are so apt to attend us when suffering from the knowledge of failure in any undertaking great or small.

"What an eccentric man Mr. Travers is!" was the simple observation with which she now turned the conversation from the criticism of a new head-dress. This had nothing whatever to do with Richard, what could it have? and Aunt Ann, though greatly relieved to find her so conversable, felt secretly angry at the apathy with which the departure of her son had been regarded. Easily led, however, her mind quickly received any idea forced upon it; and she therefore very readily answered with much warmth,

"Ah, indeed, he is! You see, he not only dined out, but slept and breakfasted also;

but then you know, my dear, I give him perfect freedom to do as he likes when with me."

"Do you think still that he means anything? I fear dear Margaret is sadly out of spirits."

"Why?" exclaimed Aunt Ann, with sudden interest, "he is as attentive as ever, is he not?"

"Ye-es! but I have fancied since the night of Mrs. Mortham's party, when he refused to go, that Margaret has not seemed in her usual spirits. I have heard a great deal of Mr. Travers, and, indeed, if only from what Mr. Daventry said, I should fear it was one of his foibles to try and make every one in love with him. Should you not think so?"

"No," replied Aunt Ann, with more abruptness than was her wont, "the character which Mr. Travers bears in the circles in which he is known, and they are

not narrow ones, is that of an upright, honourable, and high-minded man."

"Oh! then it must be that he is afraid to come forward—and I think Margaret likes him, at least, I have always fancied so. If only such a hint were conveyed, as clever fathers and mothers sometimes can convey, why, then—but she has no father or mother here."

"While Margaret is with me, I consider that I hold all the right of mother over her," said Mrs. Daventry, piqued at this evident setting aside of her authority, "and when the hint is necessary for her happiness, I shall not withold it."

"Oh, dear no, certainly not! you know far too much of the world, I am sure." She gave a look towards the beach which was difficult to read, though evil angels perhaps possessed the clue to it.

"I think I do," said Aunt Ann, turning back with her usual impetuosity.

"I know you do, nor would I desire to entrust the most delicate affair to better hands," said Miss Anstruther, in the softest and most amiable of voices.

But Aunt Ann walked on in unusual silence. Miss Anstruther's word irritated and piqued her, but effectually awakened her attention. She was very fond of meddling in love matters, and glad of anything which imperatively forced her as she believed to interfere, and, therefore, she was not very reluctant to believe, that it was her duty to stand up as Margaret's champion, and force her dilatory admirer to declare his intentions.

Something told her, however, that this would be a difficult task, although Aunt Ann had a way of her own of mastering all difficulties; yet, suggested to her by a third party, it appeared to her a hard duty, and before she reached the end of the

parade, she believed herself called upon to play the part of a martyr.

Here, however, the first row of shops presented themselves as a ready relief to her feelings, and turning rapidly round the corner, thus facing the wind with a determined but still injured manner, she soon dived into a fancy shop full of the newest German wool patterns, and found refuge in what she regarded as one of the best privileges of wealth—shopping.

It was true that in consequence of this innate love of purchasing she was always short of ready money, and found it almost impossible to indulge her natural amiability of disposition, except in making presents, which consisted of what might be termed her "failures." Still the habit was inveterate, as inveterate as was the accompanying belief that she was always poor; a fact which may be true of a millionaire, if possessed of

no judgment as to money matters, and no rule as to expenditure.

Wholly unconscious of this by-plot, Margaret sat still upon the smooth stone which she had chosen from amongst the low rocks, which lie so far out upon the beach at Hastings. It was here that she had walked with Miss Anstruther, in friendly converse but a few weeks since, and she now anxiously questioned herself as to her dealings with her. In reply, stood up boldly an unaffected interest in Richard's future, and the same indefinable suspicion of Julia's integrity of mind; but so little could this suspicion be substantiated by any fact, that she questioned herself again and again, as to the grounds upon which she had rested her judgment. In her own honest independence of purpose, she alone found her comfort, and very glad she was to think that instead of lingering on there with no settled intention, the express train had car-

ried Richard to town. Fresh blew the pleasant breeze across the sea, fanning her forehead and breathing of health in its blustrous fashion, and her thoughts turned from this perplexing theme, to dwell with bounding confidence and joy upon another. Well had her woman's heart understood the eager start, and unguarded speech of Mr. Travers. Deeply did she reverence the humility, which, in its chivalric love, could place her so much beyond him, and which would, had she not loved, have excited her fear. But fear had no place in her feelings, she reverenced and respected him, but love is not afraid. Some element of true love is always wanting where fear has entered. She knew herself, and she felt as if she knew and understood him.

Then she heard a step coming over the rocks behind her, and a shadow fell upon the smooth sand which lay at her feet. She looked up with a bright smile, like

that which is sometimes seen upon the face of childhood.

Mr. Travers was pale; very pale, yet self-possessed. He was in riding dress, and held a handsomely mounted whip in his hand.

"You are alone," he said, "Miss Hamilton. I did not expect to find you alone."

"My aunt and Miss Anstruther are on the parade, I believe. I left them a quarter of an hour ago to stroll down here. Shall we join them?" She rose as she spoke.

"Yes! if you are so disposed," he said gently, "and yet this spot, which you have chosen, is a very agreeable one. We will wait here a few minutes. Something I wished to say to you, but I have hardly the courage."

Margaret seated herself again, and Mr. Travers found a resting place upon a stone near at hand. He looked out to sea and seemed lost in thought, then, after a length-

ened pause, he turned and looked at her earnestly.

"You remember," he said, "our agreement. That as your own friend, or as your father's friend, in some past time, you would regard me. You have not forgotten it? It holds yet?"

"No, I have not forgotten."

"Whatever reasons may exist for nullifying that agreement, you have not judged me by what others think, but by your own experience."

"Am I so easily led?"

"No, no! I do not think so; and yet some circumstances act upon the most powerful minds. But I am grateful that with regard to me, you still preserve the same feelings."

How these words, so calmly and yet so gently spoken, contrasted with his unguarded manner of the other evening! With what dignity, and yet with what almost womanly sweetness he was speaking!

"You will forgive me, then, Miss Hamilton, if, as that father's friend, or friend of yours in years gone by, I have presumed to watch you with a care and attention, which, under other circumstances, would scarcely have been justifiable. If, too, I have ventured to pry into your concerns, as far as such things may honestly be done, you must also forgive me."

"But why—why?" cried Margaret, timidly and anxiously.

"Do not look so like a frightened bird. I found nothing, which being known, could pain a mind so noble as yours; but trouble I did find, trouble sufficient to cause that heavy shadow which is so often on your brow. Do you forgive me for trying to interpret it?"

Margaret was silent; but seeing that he waited for an answer, she said:

"I cannot believe that you would either act from simple curiosity, or that you would

do anything which, however kind, would be imprudent."

"I hope not, and yet you may think I have exceeded my powers; but I will be candid, and trust afterwards to your generous forgiveness if I have done wrong. I have learned lately a great deal of your father; and, if I mistake not, he is the subject of your anxiety?"

Margaret clasped her hands, and such a look of woful supplication came into her face, that Mr. Travers hurried on:

"May I ask you a question? Nay, forgive me if I am too plain-spoken; but is it true, that he is only in the receipt of a hundred a-year?"

"Yes, only a hundred!" said Margaret, with pale face and puzzled eyes; "but we —but I am very thankful that he has so much."

"Then, do you think he would be very much offended at my offering him a small

government appointment? It is very small, only two hundred a-year, but the duties are light, and perhaps suited to one whose early energies have been worn down by misfortune. It is very small, but these things are so difficult to get, that—"

"Oh! blessings upon you!" cried Margaret joyfully, then, bowing her head, she covered her face with her hands, lost in the first ecstacies of overpowering but deep and solemn thankfulness. "Oh, my father!" she thought, "is your help come at last. Ah! had you but patiently waited for it! Yet, even now, how it will soothe your spirit, and gladden your heart!"

"Nay, nay," said Mr. Travers, gently, "it is but a trifle, but one-tenth of what he deserves. Only tell me you think he will accept it, and I will write to Lord S—— by this evening's post and secure it. When that is done, you will, perhaps, be kind enough to make him the offer. Until then,

we will say nothing about it. Will you take my arm? I have been rough and rude—how your hand trembles!"

"Only with joy; my poor father is to me so very dear."

"I knew as much," said he, seriously, "and very glad I am to be able to lessen your care, and to minister, however humbly, and at however great a distance, to your happiness. I do assure you, I earnestly desire it, and pray fervently that a blessing may rest upon you, and upon him you have chosen. You are in all things wise, faithful and good, and you have remembered, I trust, that in this important decision your first great duty is to yourself."

He handed her up the steps by which the esplanade is gained, where Aunt Ann was waiting for her, and pressing the hand he held, he turned courteously to greet his hostess; and after remaining a few minutes passed in conversation with her, he walked to his horse, which a groom from the livery-

stables held for him at the rails, mounted it, and rode slowly away.

Aunt Ann was by far too great a tactician to notice Margaret's very evident absence of mind as they walked towards home. She was contented to find them together, and quite satisfied now, that nothing but a most judicious hint from herself was needed to make everything as it should be, and to close her sojourn at Hastings with all the éclat she desired, making, too, what she always set steadily before her as a great object, "one mouth less to feed in Starborne Street."

At dinner, and during the rest of the evening, the party remained much together, and the conversation was general. Mr. Travers was grave but collected, and seemed determined to enter upon any topic which was brought forward. To Margaret he was kind and attentive, but with a manner which was studiously frank and friendly. Upon her side, however, there was much embarrassment, and it was well, perhaps, that something had

occurred to counterbalance the excessive pleasure, which she would otherwise have scarcely known how to conceal. No opportunity, however, occurred of speaking to him again alone that night, but she was resolved that she would not, under any circumstances, feel justified in allowing the impression that she was engaged to Richard to remain upon his mind.

She retired to bed with an uneasy feeling, for Mr. Travers was one of those men who are accustomed to leave a place at any hour, in any way, and at any time; no one was quite certain of seeing him again without a positive engagement. Either this habit was an eccentricity of genius, or his will took advantage of this ready excuse for it; but certainly it existed, and Margaret could not, when she retired to rest, help reproaching herself for having failed in the exercise of that ready tact which usually befriended her. Then she remembered how generous his conduct had

been; how noble the obligation conferred, at a moment when he might have been excused if he had vented his disappointment, as Richard had done, in ill-humour.

"Ah! but then," thought Margaret, "it may be that he regards me, really, only as a friend."

This thought oppressed her; and it was in vain that she reproached herself for not being glad that night. She would willingly have thought only of her father, but she found it impossible.

The next morning rose with almost magic beauty; clear, bright and cheerful, yet with a gentle breeze stirring the atmosphere, and giving life and elasticity to the spirits. Margaret hurried down stairs, with the full determination of speaking to Mr. Travers. He was out, for his hat was gone, and the large stick, whose resting-place in the hall she knew so well, was gone also; but she could not have the courage to ask about him, and

so waited with impatience. If he returned to breakfast, she felt sure of seeing him alone, as both her aunt and Miss Anstruther gave ample time to their Sunday morning toilette. But would he come? Yes, there was the gate opening, and now he advanced near the house; and her courage failed, and she would have run up stairs if her common sense had let her; so she stood trying to busy herself with the breakfast things, and to appear intent upon measuring the proper quantity of tea.

He came in, wished her good morning with the gravity of the night before, and then would have left the room again.

"One moment!" cried Margaret

He turned back.

"You made a slight mistake, yesterday," she said as calmly as she could, "and your congratulations are unnecessary. I just wished to explain that there was a mistake, though how it has arisen, I cannot imagine."

He advanced quickly to the table, and stood looking eagerly down upon her blushing face. She rallied immediately, and looking up merrily, she said whilst she slowly placed the tea in the tea-pot.

"Engage me again at your peril."

There was now so much of the spirit of nonsense and common-place in her manner, that any serious rejoinder would have been impossible, for Margaret had determined that no moment of hurry or simple accident, should force forward that declaration of affection, which, in all but actual words, had been so plainly spoken. Mr. Travers stood in silent surprise, but seeing that her mood was more impenetrable than the most obstinate fit of sullen ill-humour, he took a chair, merely saying with a teasing look,

"I shall enjoy my breakfast this morning."

The look deepened the glowing colour of her cheek to a richer bloom, but she would not be conquered, or shew anything less than

the most common place attention to the breakfast-table, which certainly that morning, seemed to demand an extra supervision.

But how easy it appeared, how welcome when she came at last, was Aunt Ann in her last new gown, how candid and pleasant even seemed Miss Anstruther to her, in the hush of childlike happiness which had fallen upon her spirit. How comfortable the letter of Alice looked, dry in its details as it was, and condescending as were her expressions of interest in the simple pleasures of Hastings, contrasted as they were with the higher calls of duty and self-improvement.

She could bear to think of Starborne Street now, not with the heart-sickness formerly attached to its very name; but in glad thankfulness that soon it would be receiving its happy tidings of the substantial service, rendered by the generous heart of him to whom, in her heart of hearts, she rendered homage.

The sun was not bright, yet the day was warm and sultry, and Aunt Ann declared she could walk no further than the old church of St. Clement's, but Margaret needed no country walk to deepen the solemn charm upon her heart. Sitting in the high old-fashioned pew, overhung by the heavy gallery, while the light stole tremulously through the narrow and dust-stained windows, she found something still in all to minister to that thankfulness which found its response in the solemn service.

She could almost have fancied that the sermon had been chosen on purpose to answer to her thoughts.

"Oh! that my people had hearkened unto "me, and Israel had walked in my ways."

"I should soon have subdued their ene-"mies, and turned my hand against their "adversaries."

"He should have fed them also with the

"finest of the wheat, and with honey out of "the rock, should I have satisfied thee!"

Alas! but had he waited, he, her father, for whom she had struggled and wrestled as for herself. Came there no dark misgivings? Through the pleasant words of the preacher ran there no sad tones, speaking of sinful impatience, and a fallen nature, which would not bear its trial? Margaret perceived them not, or heard them only as enhancing the mercy.

How happy was the afternoon, for through the greater part of it, she and Mr. Travers were alone, not talking of themselves, but as he sat in the arm-chair which had almost become his own, she chose the low one by the window, and read, at his request, in her rich melodious voice, from the Holy Narrative, he speaking ever now and then as some beautiful idea struck him in its full force, but never wandering into discursive talk. So passed the afternoon, and in the evening, her hand

upon his arm, they wandered about the pleasant Croft, or allowing Mrs. Daventry and her guest to be a little in advance, loitered by the sea, and listened together, and moralised as they listened, to the rising tide.

It might be that the night of the past had been so very dark and dreary. It might be that that weary shadow fell again so soon and so heavily round her, but Margaret always looked upon this as one of the brightest days of her life.

CHAPTER X.

"To-day," said Mr. Travers, as he stood in the early morning before his toilet glass, "I will ask Margaret Hamilton to be my wife, and if I read a-right her honest words and still more honest eyes, I shall meet with a straightforward answer."

He did not add, in words, what would be the tenor of that straightforward answer, but looking into the mirror, and smoothing back the manly waves of his dark hair, his eyes met their reflection with an expression

of happiness and dignified satisfaction, which had in it such power of fascination, that even she, could she have read it a-right, would not have deemed it presumptuous. It was the consciousness of a manly purpose, and an honest and open wooing, for, except when actuated by the persuasion that Richard Daventry held a place in her heart, which he would not seek to rival, he had not for a moment lost sight of his steady intention; first to watch, and, then, to woo and win her.

The few summer weeks which they had passed together, might, for such a purpose, appear short and insufficient, but few can look back upon their lives without remembering that time is not in reality measured by the almanac.

Of this fact, few were so well aware as Mr. Travers, and, in the seemingly short time which had linked them together, he had reached a knowledge and intimacy for

which years are often inadequate. He very justly believed that for one who, though still in the vigour and full flower of manhood, was yet old in feeling and experience, who had suffered himself once to be led rather by pity than by reason, to approach a second marriage with rashness, or precipitation, would be blamable indeed. Like many other high-minded and upright men, he felt now that he would rather run the chance of deserving the censure of being fickle-hearted, than act over again the years which had exercised upon him so sad an influence.

Relying upon his own purpose, knowing his own will, and conscious of his own rectitude, he had intentionally and honourably delayed an explanation. But he deemed the time arrived now, when the control which he had placed upon his wishes might be laid aside, when, sanctioned by his judgment, his love might have its way. His

had been an honest, manly, open-hearted, unfailing courtship, and he was now prepared to crown it with honourable and straightforward proposals.

Not so thought Aunt Ann, as, full of the little contrivances, and skilled in the many by-ways and crooked paths of the world, she stood at her mirror, and arranged her showy cap about her still good-looking and well-rounded face.

"These men," thought she, "never can get on without us, and a little, just a little management is required to land every fish which takes the hook. Trifle with Margaret he shall not, and if he is as easily led now as when he first married, there will be no fear of it, at least, with a little tact. He talks, I know, of going to that cattle show to-morrow, and being once on his way to London, it will be easy, if he is getting faint-hearted, to write back and say business prevents his returning. I

know men will, it is just the very thing they are sure to do at the most provoking time! Yes, not a moment is to be lost. *To-day* I will ask him his intentions." Portentous words!

While these thoughts were working and finding strength, Margaret was indulging the happiest of day dreams; over the darkness of the past and the uncertainties of the future, a bright and hopeful love was casting its golden beams. In this mood, glad to be alone, she retired to the foot of an old tree upon the Croft, amongst the tangled roots of which she found a seat, and set herself to finish the sketch of the church which she was anxious to carry back with her. The branches of the tree threw a pleasant shadow round her, and the birds from the shelter of the surrounding foliage, warbled in glad unison with her thoughts. She was very tranquil, tranquil with the nobility of a mind which has learned to trust through the dark waters which have

threatened to overwhelm her, and can now welcome the coming sunshine with the peaceful satisfaction which is purchased alone by previous resignation. She could well wait now for the full confirmation of that love, of the existence of which she was so persuaded, and yet it was with a tremulously beating heart that she indulged the consciousness of being loved, and she was shyly sensitive, and glad to hide her blushing face here amongst the pleasant shadows of the Croft.

Presently, as the morning advanced, she saw Miss Anstruther with her bonnet carelessly tied, coming towards her. She looked heated and tired.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, dear," said she, "and this tremendous heat has quite exhausted me."

"I am very sorry," said Margaret, "did you want me?"

"I tried to find you, for there is a note for you. I carried it about with me for a long

time, and then left it in the little drawing-room; I am so tired, or I would go back and fetch it for you."

"Oh, no! I will go myself," said Margaret, reluctantly, giving a few more touches to the drawing, but seeing that Miss Anstruther seated herself close at hand, and feeling of late little inclined for a tête-à-tête with her, she gathered up her drawing materials, and saying she would go and see what her note was about, she walked into the house. Julia did not attempt to follow her, but cried out after her,

"Remember, I put it on the table in the little drawing-room."

Margaret knew that Julia had a habit of making much of trifles, and she did not feel her curiosity much excited, though in a country residence the coming of a note really forms an event of some importance. She walked straight to the little drawing-room, however, and soon laid her hand upon

across the downs, until the sense of perfect loneliness arrested her further progress; and feeling, for the first time, weary, she sat down and looked around her. The scene was one of peaceful beauty and of grand repose. On either side rose high hills. Upon the slope of one of them she was now sitting, and in the deep cleft of the rocks, which, at some distant time past must have been rent asunder, a miniature wood was lying, clad in its richest of summer foliage, beneath, close to the sea, the undercliff was decked with bright gorse and underwood, while, far as the eye could travel, lay a smooth, unruffled summer sea. Where she sat, beneath the shadow of the high hill, she heard no song of bird or hum of insect, no whispering of the breeze, no murmur of the sea, nothing but a silence so perfect that it could be felt. Happy are those who cannot remember to have suffered from such a tumult of passionate excite-

ment, as buries all thought of reason. Margaret covered her face with her hands, and listened to the *silence*. It seemed to reply in stern rebuke; and then she meditated, not peacefully, but in that deceitful calm which is despair. She knew her aunt so well, that from the one sentence she had heard, she could imagine the whole interview. With another man it might have answered, so she reasoned, but not with one of his peculiar disposition and great refinement of feeling. Besides, though in mind she looked up to him with reverence as to one above her, still in the wordly position, which her aunt would evidently take, she felt, that though without fortune, she was yet possessed of all the advantages which in education or manner, wealth can give; she was young, and received in society more than usual attention, while he was a widower with a family. Yet he had been asked

to accept her, as it were, to take in pity the heart which had been, perchance, too easily won, to make an offer of his hand, dictated, not by affection, but by honour. Even if he were sincere, as that morning she had believed him to be, was she to be forced upon him! given unasked! Her heated imagination lashed itself again into a mood unmanageable and irrational; and she almost groaned aloud, though not a tear stained by its course the heated cheek or flashing eye.

Suddenly as she raised her head, as if to find sympathy in those mighty clouds, whose snowy ridges built up the sky, she saw the figure of a man upon the opposite hill, one whose coming, or whose going, she had noted too often to mistake now.

She might, by a hasty retreat, have cut him off, and gained the high road across the hills, but only by a retreat which would have been a flight. It did not suit her to attempt it, and rising from the ground, she

took quickly the path leading homewards, by which indeed she must pass him; but she calculated that this would be better than waiting until he reached her.

They met upon the rise of the hill, and Margaret, saying something about its being a fine afternoon for a walk, would have passed him, but he turned back with her. She did not look up, had she done so she would have seen that he was very pale. She had rightly divined his character, nothing is so damping or so cooling, as a question such as Aunt Ann's knowledge of the world and ignorance of character had dictated. He was very pale, but cool and collected. She did not attempt to notice his mood. In the bitterness of the moment, she did not care for that or any thing, her mind being alone fully occupied with the wish to reach home, and then in some way instantly to leave Hastings.

"Are you in so great a hurry?" he said, after keeping up with her for some little time in silence.

"I have been out for a long time," said Margaret, "and they will wonder what has become of me" She still hurried on.

They reached, at length, the little gate upon the down, and, with the pretence of opening it for her, Mr. Travers reached it before she did, but as he held it in his hand, he stopped for a moment.

"If you have no very particular wish to get back—" he began.

"I have indeed," she said rapidly, still attempting to pass; but with infinite courtesy, he yet detained her.

"I may not have another opportunity of speaking with you alone, and I have very much to say, forgive my urgency, but Mrs. Daventry has kindly permitted me to—"

Margaret lifted her head now, and with

the same flashing eyes and burning cheek, but with an air at once cool and determined, she said gravely but quietly,

"When I tell you that accident took me two hours since to the little drawing-room, and that I heard one sentence of my aunt's which was sufficient to form a clue to the conversation to which you allude, I feel certain that you will spare yourself the necessity of any further explanation. If my aunt has not altogether forfeited for me the friendship which I have esteemed an honour, I shall still at some future time be proud to possess it." He had taken his hand from the gate, and she had passed through, but then she turned and said with attempted frankness, "I shall leave you now to continue your walk. Good bye!"

He did not reply, but stood still, watching her as she descended the steep pathway with fleet footsteps. She was thinking too much

of the humiliation she had endured to remember him.

It took but a little while more to reach the Croft, and then pausing to control herself, she sought her aunt's presence.

"I will not reproach you, aunt," she said as after a brief explanation, she stood before her in all the brilliancy of her beauty. "You have acted as you thought right, although you knew how very much I should be distressed and annoyed. All I ask now is that you will allow some one to see me to the station. The last train leaves at five, and I shall reach London while it is light. I must be there to-night."

Mrs. Daventry who was now really distressed, annoyed and terrified, interposed all her rhetoric in vain. Margaret was so insensible to any further discussion of the subject, as scarcely to distinguish between her reproaches and her entreaties. She would

reach London that night, and a stronger mind than Aunt Ann's would have been required to turn Margaret from her purpose. Finding it impossible to keep her either by argument or command, Aunt Ann endeavoured to mollify her as much as possible, by aiding her preparations. A hastily cooked chop was procured for her, although Margaret could not eat a bit of it. A fly was hastily ordered, the boxes were rapidly packed and lifted upon it, and Valentine was hurried off to escort her to town. Mrs. Daventry accompanied her to the station, and as she deposited her in the railway carriage, bestowed the warmest of kisses upon her cold lips.

"Forgive me, dearest," she whispered, "I did it for the best."

"I know it," said Margaret, as if suddenly awakened from a trance-like silence.

"And you do forgive me?"

Margaret took her hand murmuring sadly: "Yes, yes, I do!"

She felt it impossible to refuse pardon to the kind heart, but inconsiderate tongue of a relative, whom from childhood she had regarded with peculiar affection.

The train moved on, Aunt Ann stood kissing her hand and making signs to her to keep up her spirits, but she sank back in a corner of the carriage, trying to find rest for her aching thoughts.

CHAPTER XI.

MARGARET was grateful to find that the carriage remained vacant, for she was much in need of that perfect repose to which solitude ministers. She had only thought, until now, of getting from Hastings, but she had also to give a reason for returning in this sudden and alarming manner to Starborne Street. To her father she felt that she could tell anything; but not to her mother, whose temper had already suffered too severely from the changes of fortune, to make

her be to her child as a ministering angel in her suffering. And yet she must not lose that character for consistency and common sense, which had hitherto enabled her to exercise such power and influence at home. No; it was due to those who loved and trusted in her to tell them the whole truth, and, however disagreeable, she would do it.

A noble and candid resolve always has its strengthening effect upon the mind, and Margaret felt that she could set all difficuty aside, and not make her unexplained return an additional trouble. Alice might look upon her with that pity which is akin to contempt; but yet she would feel that she had set her and Olivia an example worth following in family candour and confidence.

Then she suffered her thoughts to go back to the day which had just passed. She had acted wholly from impulse, and had that impulse led her wrong? No, she could not

feel that it had. Under the circumstances, to have heard Mr. Travers out, and to have accepted the dictated offer, would have been impossible. Impossible would it alike have been to have ever taken that place in his regard, without which, marriage with such a man would have been certain unhappiness.

She had given him, even by the exercise of a little pardonable petulance, the opportunity for an honourable retreat, a really honourable retreat, leaving him without reproach. No, she could look back upon no part of the day with self-condemnation, as far as her acts had been concerned. Mr. Travers was now free, their paths lay far apart, and they might never meet again; and yet, as he was too good and generous a man to keep back that government appointment he had promised, the arrangements about this would bring them again into communication. But would he seek her further? She tried to

put this thought back, and resolutely to remember nothing but that they had parted, probably for ever; but she could not. Never to see him again, never to hear the voice which to her had ever been so truthful and so kind; never to share again those high thoughts and glorious imaginings, which had broken like the sun through her cloud of adversity, seemed too heavy a burden for endurance.

She remembered the sparkling wit never ill employed; the gentle, unpretending manners so certain an accompaniment of true genius; and now that her dignity stood fully vindicated, and every mile took her further from him, love found its power, and grief forced its way in sobs and tears. She was alone, as for months she felt she might not be again, in the small and slenderly partitioned house in Starborne Street, which seemed in her remembrance all too narrow to hide such a grief as hers. Back to her poor aching

heart she must henceforth press it; but not now, she was alone, and tears should have their course, or her heart must break. The journey seemed all too rapid, the engine with its mighty throbbings, panting and always out of breath, seemed hurrying her forward with remorseless and unsympathising speed.

If Aunt Ann had but left things alone, they might have been standing together now, in perfect happiness, by that rippling sea. A fresh burst of tears came at this remembrance, and then bending down her head and covering her face with her hands, she tried to pray for strength to be humble and gentle, good and kind, through this heavy trial, remembering those at home, who were but as her children in moral strength. Blessed, indeed, are those who, noble in prosperity, and energetic in adversity, bear the heart's heaviest sufferings with the pliant humility of the "bruised reed," which shall not be broken.

The stations upon the road became now more familiar, and that of Croydon being passed, the smoke of London began to be perceptible. Margaret tried to arouse herself, and became more quiet and composed; but she had tasted nothing since the morning, and began to feel so faint and exhausted, that she was glad to remember that Valentine was with her, and that she should have no trouble in finding her luggage, or in seeking for a cab.

Presently the engine puffed, and snorted its way into the Waterloo station; and Margaret, thinking again of her unexpected return home, looked out uneasily as the carriages passed up the platform, and she saw so many expecting faces waiting for these country arrivals.

Had not the past possessed a too fearful reality, she would now have believed herself the sport of some idle dream, for there upon the platform stood Mark, looking carefully

at each carriage as it passed him, and hurrying to her, with a fervent exclamation of thankfulness, the moment he caught sight of her.

"I hardly hoped you could get up to-night, but I came upon the chance, and I am so thankful you are come!"

"Oh, Mark!" she exclaimed, looking in his face which bore the cold, pale traces of suppressed suffering, "something is the matter. Have you sent for me?"

"Yes, by telegraph this afternoon; if the message did not reach you, why are you here?"

"I will tell you another time; tell me now why you sent for me?"

"Our father is very ill," said Mark, now upon his guard, "and you know when anything is the matter, we cannot get on without you."

He did not say he was sorry to summon her from a pleasant visit, they understood each other too well to render such words possible.

Valentine had now secured the luggage and came for orders.

"Take charge of it here for a little time," said Mark, "and we will come back to you."

He took Margaret on to a more retired part of the station, where they could speak undisturbed. The bare walls, and never ending iron columns, looked dreary enough; but there was room for talk, which was all they wanted.

"You have more to tell," said Margaret, as leaning upon his kindly arm, they walked to and fro.

"Yes!" said Mark, slowly and unwillingly, "I sent down a message by the telegraph this afternoon, saying he was ill, and you had better come up, and some one should meet you. I hoped you would have been a little prepared."

"Tell me," said Margaret earnestly.

"He had bad news yesterday," said Mark,

timidly. "He was told at the bank that his services were no longer needed, and that if he liked to leave before the end of the quarter his salary would be paid up. As far as I can learn, it was civilly done; but it has been a heavy blow to him, and through him to us all."

Margaret lent heavily upon his arm, and stopped as if unable to proceed further.

"We hope everything from you," whispered Mark, "everything from your brave heart."

"And you heard of it?" asked Margaret.

"This morning. They were afraid to send last night, but Fred came and fetched me this morning. I have been down, and only left to send for you. He is in such a fearful state of despondency, that he will not speak to any one. I hope everything from you. You and I have done our best hitherto, we can say so with an honest conscience, Margaret, our very best; and we must not fail him now. Many

a time I have dined off a crust of bread, that I might save the more for him."

Tears fell down his cheeks, which in one day had grown haggard and careworn.

"We have both loved with more than common love, we must have courage now, and be true, though our cup be full of misery, full to the brim."

"Noble Mark!" whispered Margaret, softly, she believed that for all purposes of earthly happiness her heart was broken now. The blow was heavy indeed, but it fell upon a bowed head.

"Let us go to him at once," she said, at length, "you can tell me anything more upon the road."

Mark knew that there was little more to tell, for in a few words is often concentrated a world of suffering. He led her, therefore, silently back to where Valentine was waiting, and having procured a cab, he told him that he

had better not go further with them, but return, by the earliest train in the morning, to his mistress at Hastings, with the news of Margaret's safe arrival, and of Mr. Hamilton's continued illness.

Having thus dismissed him, knowing that, the more because he was an old and confidential servant of his aunt's, his presence would be annoying to his mother, he followed Margaret into the cab, telling the man where to drive; feeling, although usually so patient about trifles, a little irritated at his finding it so difficult to understand the address; it seemed like a reproach to the obscurity of Starborne Street.

Home! Margaret was going home, and to what a home now! but as she lay back silently in the corner of the cab, she felt a strength, which is not derivable from earth, gradually nerving her. The blow dealt by some great sorrow seems, to human eyes, to

fall with equal violence upon all, the good and erring alike; but Heaven knows how to shield its own, and for those under its peculiar care there is always light, even in the midst of darkness.

To surround them all with her loving influence, to rouse her father, to shield him, to comfort her mother, to set her sisters fresh examples of self denial, formed objects enough to rouse a mind of natural nobility.

These thoughts gained force as, the Angel Inn passed, they drove through the Lower Road, and so on to Starborne Street, and she took Mark's hand and said earnestly, with something of her old brightness lighting up her pale face,

"If you will bear up, Mark, I will."

"Yes, yes, I will, to-morrow, to-morrow! I have been so overcome to-day."

They stopped at the door, and no one came to open it but Mary, who, in answer to

Mark's enquiries, said, as if determined to make the worst of it, in the very earnestness of her sympathy.

"No, master was not at all better, he hadn't eaten nothing all day."

The boxes were lifted down, and the cab dismissed, and then Margaret walked in.

"Where were they all?" she asked, startled at the unusual silence.

"Down stairs."

Each afraid to be the bearer of unwelcome news, they all waited for her together; and Margaret descended to the little parlour below, so often before described, where she was almost overcome by the various sounds of welcome and condolence which met her ears.

"To think that it should come to this," said Mrs. Hamilton, rocking herself to and fro in the bewilderment of a grief which rendered her regardless of others.

"We should learn to bear calamity and

affliction with patience," said Alice, sententiously.

"Oh, Alice, how can you talk so!" cried Olivia, impatiently.

"Margaret is tired, and nobody thinks of her," said Fred, giving a kind of back handed hit at his sisters, as he sprang to her, and with boyish haste tried to untie her bonnet,

Margaret looked from one to the other with an expression of exquisite pain in her beautiful eyes.

"Mother, get her some tea," said Mark.

"Go and tell Mary, Fred;" said Mrs. Hamilton, still weeping.

"Bring back a candle," said Margaret, kissing the boy's forehead, as he ran off.

"Mamma, is papa alone?" she enquired, "may I go to him?"

"Mr. Smith is with him," said Alice, in a tone of importance.

"Who is Mr. Smith?"

"Not know Mr. Smith!" said Alice.

"Fred's schoolmaster do you mean?" said Margaret in surprise.

"Yes!" said Alice with dignity, "the gentleman he reads with. He called to-day, and as we could not get papa to say a word, we thought it better for him to see a friend, and so asked him to walk up. He has been good enough to call this evening. I wonder you should forget him."

"Forget him!" said Margaret excitedly, "no. He will drive papa mad."

She seized the candle which Fred had brought her, and, only stopping to say to Mark, "Do not go until I come down;" hurried up stairs.

She met Mr. Smith upon the stairs, and bowing hastily, would have passed him; but he detained her, saying as he held her unwilling hand,

"Your father is in a precarious state, he

seems speechless. I will call again to-morrow."

"Thank you!" said Margaret coldly, in the midst of her agitation; for she looked upon him with suspicion, as belonging to a canting set of religionists, who serve only to bring the noble body to which they belong into contempt. Mr. Smith, who possibly regarded her as one to whom beauty had proved a worldly snare, left her without any attempt at further detention; and she hurried up the stairs, until she reached the closed door of her father's room, where, placing the candle upon the floor, she knelt down for a few seconds. Then, rising, she opened the door and went in, in the strength of her love.

The curtains were drawn, and the light shaded. Mr. Hamilton was lying upon one side, his face buried in the pillow.

She walked softly to him, and kneeling down, whispered, "dear papa!"

Mr. Hamilton raised himself upon one elbow, looked at her earnestly and strangely, as if to be certain of who it was; then, burying his face again in the pillow, he sobbed like a child, but low and piteously, like one who was indeed becoming fast a child again.

"Dearest papa," she whispered, still kneeling, still clinging to the hope that this prostration was grief only. "I bring you good news."

"Impossible!" mumured he, slowly.

"I never deceived you yet, never," said Margaret, "not in the least trifle. Believe me, dearest, I bring good news."

He looked up with such an appearance of sudden interest, that she was encouraged to proceed.

"A gentleman I know, a friend of Aunt Ann's, who has been staying with us at

Hastings, who used to bank with you, is almost certain of getting a small government appointment for you, small, but independent. Will not that be better than the Bank?"

"It is too late!" he murmured, clasping his hands together. "Oh, heaven! had I but trusted. But now," he resumed piteously, "it is too late; all is confusion here," he pointed to his head. "Bless you, my pretty, loving child! but it is all, all too late. They know it, I am branded, I deserve it."

"No, no, no!" said Margaret.

"The sky is black above me, my infamy is written there!" he said, wanderingly, using the words of Ion. She soothed him as a mother soothes her weary child.

"He would be better to-morrow; she would bring him some tea."

No, he would have none, he had brought his wife and children to ruin, and he would eat no more.

Margaret did not remain to combat his words, but went down stairs again, softly.

"Make me a nice bit of buttered toast, Mary," said she, as she passed the kitchen, "and put a slice of bread and butter and some tea, for papa and me, on a tray. I will take it up." She stood by the fire while it was getting ready, and then took it up stairs. He refused to take it, but she set it upon the bed within his reach, and began her own tea, remonstrating gently.

"I will not ask you now to have any meat," she said coaxingly, "although I know you have had no dinner, but a little toasted bread surely we can afford."

This skilful argument prevailed upon his weakened mind, and Mr. Hamilton having once broken his fast, ate with the hurry of a famished man.

"Now, then, you shall sleep," she said softly, "but first let me say your evening prayer."

She knelt down then, and repeated "Our Father," in a voice, the steadfastness of which evinced the deep faith and love, which were the moving springs of her life.

Before she had finished he had closed his eyes, and, stealing gently from the room, she went down stairs.

Mark was waiting with his hat in his hand.

"I hope every thing from extreme quiet and indulgence," she said, answering his enquiries.

"And from religious consolation," said Alice.

Margaret glanced at her, but could read nothing through the look of stoical resolution in which she had encased herself; yet the words sounded hard and cold.

"Come early to-morrow," she said, as she went up with Mark to the door.

"As early as possible," said he, "but

poor Jasper's case comes on in a day or two, and I have still much to do for him."

"Well, then, as early as you can," she said, wishing him good night upon the door steps; and giving, as he went away, a sad and wistful glance up and down the narrow street, the very architecture of which seemed drawn with the lines of care.

Closing the door, she went in again, and sat down to hear her mother's renewed sobs and lamentations. She gathered through them what she had already half imagined, how, at the usual time, the husband and father had dragged himself home, and having told his sad news, without note or comment, had gone up to the bed from which he had not since risen.

Judging that nothing would tranquillize her mother more than renewed hope, she told her of Mr. Travers's promise, and

urged her to aid her in restoring Mr. Hamilton to himself.

This had the desired effect of awakening Mrs. Hamilton to the true subject of anxiety, which, until then, no one but Margaret and Mark seemed to have surmised.

To find other employment, or to supply their lost income, difficult as it might be, was, Margaret felt, a thing to be achieved by patience and perseverance; but who upon earth could bind up the broken heart, or waken to energy the mind which had learned the melancholy lessons of despair.

CHAPTER XII.

When Margaret retired to rest, it was with a feeling of grief too heavy for thought, and after trying to follow her nightly reading for a few minutes, she gave it up, and hastening to lie down, she trusted the mighty grief of to-day, and the coming sorrow of the morrow to Him whose watchful eye tires not, and, in whose keeping, sorrows turn to pearls of inestimable price.

The morrow came, and, though much

fatigued, at her usually early hour her weary eyes forgot to slumber. She then began quietly to review the events of yesterday, and one of the first feelings with which she welcomed the coming morning, was thankfulness that she had been prevented from engaging herself to Mr. Travers. To have brought him to such a scene of misery as this, would have been, she felt, an aggravation of her present distress, and, deeply trying as were the circumstances which now surrounded her, she felt almost glad that she had been spared from linking him to them.

To have concealed from him the state of her father's affairs would have been an impossible deception, while to have revealed them, would have seemed like forcing him to place his wealth in the breach which ill-fortune had made. Nay, not ill-fortune.

A shudder passed through her frame, and then she clasped her hands together,

and told herself again that she was glad. Glad! Yes, as the forsaken rose might feel, when severed from its stem, and left to wither in the remorseless heat of noon.

She loved with the strong power of her whole nature, and would at this moment have knelt at his feet, so that she could but have felt his presence. Yet she covered her pale face with her trembling hands, and as the tears coursed through them unsparingly, told herself that she was *glad.*

She got up, at length, and having composed and strengthened herself, went down to breakfast, where she waited impatiently for her mother's appearance. She came at length, looking haggard and carelessly dressed, complained of want of sleep, and of having no appetite for breakfast, and seemed indeed so alive to coming troubles, that she scarcely remembered the great present one, which pressed so heavily upon her daughter.

To her anxious and minute enquiries about her father, she answered almost pettishly, accusing her of remembering one parent only. Margaret caressed her affectionately, assured her of her most tender attachment, and gently reminded her that if they could only rouse him, all would be well with her and with all.

Mrs. Hamilton burst into tears, and declared that Margaret was too good a daughter for them, but much as Margaret might feel gratified at this remark, she saw with pain that tears again let loose, there was no further hope of their restraint. How correct had been Mark's observation! she must be their strength, or they would find none of themselves.

Fred, Alice, and Olivia now came in, and they sat down to breakfast. All family money matters had become an open concern now, and were usually discussed with freedom. Olivia and Fred, with that activity

of mind which welcomes even hardship, when it comes in the shape of novelty, were anxious at once to bring forward the subject of their future plans; and broached for this purpose a thousand impracticable and impossible schemes, calculated rather to confuse council than to clear it. Margaret begged them to say nothing until their father was better, for, if well again, and that government appointment were still possible, all would go on more smoothly than before. The importance of sending for a physician was now discussed, and although Mrs. Hamilton declared she knew her husband well, and that he would soon be better when the depression was gone, she yielded, at length, to Margaret's opinion, and a note was written to the kind hearted Dr. Arden, and sent by Fred, who was hurried off, charged with strict injunctions by Alice, to call and excuse himself to Mr. Smith, for his non-appearance at his studies.

Margaret then went to her father's room, and busied herself with giving it an appearance, not only of neatness but of cheerfulness, opening the window to let in whatever air could be obtained from the narrow street, and arranging the room with her accustomed taste. Mr. Hamilton noticed nothing, but remained with his hand upon his forehead, regarding only the paper on the wall.

Was he reviewing his past life, remembering the long years of patient, but satisfactory labour, which ought to have made him rich? Did he feel again the influence of his ruined partners, who had cast a shadow over his days of prosperity, and had left his old age to desolation? Was he thinking of the day of the crash, which had found him so nobly at his post, or did he remember the reaction of growing depression, which, day by day, had found him more weak, and left him weaker still. Did

his thoughts pass on then to his fall, and trace the remorse which had burned up his conscience, until, refreshed by those blessed penitential tears, let loose by her whom he had called "his pretty loving child," who with more than he had ever known of mother's love or wife's affection, had stood within the gap and kept back the ruin, which would have crushed out name and fame?

Ah! if he thought so, why not call that loving child to him, and folding his arms about her, tell her that she should be his strength once more, that for her sake he would submit to life, and cheerfully bear the lightened load which she now presented for his acceptance.

Alas—inscrutable! his eyes read still the pattern on the wall! again and again, over and over again!

No attempt to arouse him from this lethargic state of mind met with any

success, he was as silent under all Margaret's care, as he had been reported to be the day before; and she looked anxiously for the coming of Dr. Arden. But she knew that it was too probable that he would be out before her note could reach him, and that he would not be able to get to Starborne Street until the evening.

Early in the afternoon, Mr. Smith called again, and Margaret as soon as she heard of his being there, went to the drawing-room, fearing that some one would be injudicious enough to ask him to walk up to her father again.

Mr. Smith was a very successful schoolmaster, and as Frederick only went to him as a day scholar, this important qualification of his, balanced against every other consideration, and Mr. Hamilton had not thought it necessary to consider very particularly the characteristics of the man himself. Frederick's progress under his care had

been rapid and satisfactory, although his progress was equally rapid in the art of sketching his school-master with every variety of expression and every exaggeration of feature. Many were the long-nosed countenances, with upraised eyes, and slow accenting mouth, which adorned his private sketch-book; but these, beyond raising, perhaps, an injudicious laugh, were but little regarded at home, while his proficiency in the Latin grammar was so praiseworthy.

This had been well enough for the last two years, and Margaret had rejoiced in Fred's advancing knowledge, and acquiesced in the eccentricities of the school-master with as much indulgence as the rest. But now, upon her return from Hastings, and at a most inopportune time, she found him admitted as a kind of friend of the family. She heard of no diminution in the number of little boys who walked before

him into the well-filled pew at church, and yet he was designated now as simply, "the gentleman with whom Fred reads."

Olivia had, she remembered, mentioned him in her letters to Hastings, as having called once or twice, and as having politely offered his umbrella to them one day when returning from church; and she could easily understand how her mother would gladly welcome any society, which came as a break to the monotony of their life.

Margaret was, however, annoyed. She knew that in a life of seclusion, any ultra opinions, particularly those bearing upon religion, have a peculiar fascination, more especially to young and unformed minds, and she thought she already perceived that Alice was becoming influenced by those of Mr. Smith. She had not time, indeed, to see how far this influence yet extended; but she resolved to watch, and, if possible, to guard against it.

The religion which is always upon the lips, excited in her an unpleasant suspicion, not so much as being the sign of duplicity or evil, but because in itself, it appears in contradiction to that life-breathing vitality of Christianity, which, by its works, asserts and witnesses for itself, without the need of words. Not that she disapproved of the most unrestrained religious converse, but the language of Mr. Smith seemed always to begin and end with one idea, and that but badly concealed: "Listen to me, for I am better than you are, I speak from an eminence, to which you have no hope of arriving, unless you follow my example."

The burden of the one great family sorrow should not, she resolved, hinder her from watching over her sisters, and she, therefore, went down patiently to listen to Mr. Smith.

Alice was already there, and looked more

annoyed, than politeness should have suffered her to appear, at Margaret's entrance; and the elder sister began to perceive that however short the few weeks of her sojourn in Hastings appeared to her, they had been sufficient to turn Alice from the girl (of obstinate notions certainly) into the young woman of confirmed opinions.

Margaret, whose strong mind and versatile imagination would have made her young at seventy, never had been able to understand Alice, and, at this moment, she felt almost younger than her sister; nevertheless, she maintained her ground. She had asked Olivia to take her book, a new delightful railway novel, which she had brought with her from Hastings, and read quietly in her father's room. She now rang the bell, and (although she knew that Mary's face would look indignant at such an unusual call upon her time) sent her to summon her mistress. Mr. Smith's visit became, then, a veritable

morning call, and although Margaret was too sorrowful to exert the conversational powers, for which she had a pleasing reputation, she took care that none but ordinary topics should be discussed.

But into these even, Mr. Smith contrived to infuse a melancholy flavour, all his own, leaving, when he went away, an increased feeling of melancholy in Margaret's mind. How unlike, she could not help exclaiming to herself, is this man's sense of religion to the child-like faith which beautifies the mind of Mr. Travers! She checked the thought with a sigh, she must look forward and think of him no more, or remember him only as one remembers a dream, which can have no influence upon the waking fancy.

Mark came later in the afternoon, and now the day which had lagged so heavily seemed easier to bear. Walking up and down the narrow street together, they could

wait for Dr. Arden's carriage with less impatience. Waiting and watching for him seemed to bring the good man quicker, for his carriage turned down the road before they had been out a quarter of an hour. He joined the brother and sister on the pavement, and, although he had a long list of visits to pay before night-fall, he walked by their side as if his time was all their own. His time, indeed, belonged to any one who was in trouble; and to look at his still youthful face but snow white hair, one could fancy with no great stretch of the truth, perhaps, that the constant call upon his sympathies had worn him out before his time. Mark and Margaret told him as much of the truth as they could, leaving out, of course, the darker details; but to the kind-hearted doctor this was enough to awaken his sympathy. The years of failing spirits and aching poverty, ending in this cessation of employment, sufficiently account-

ed to him for Mr. Hamilton's state, and, promising to see Mark again, he paid his visit to his patient alone with Mrs. Hamilton.

When he came out again, he took Mark's arm and spoke as cheerfully as he could, but very seriously. He would come again to-morrow, it was possible the medicines he had prescribed might cause his patient to rally; but temporarily, at least, the mind was affected; and, as the humour might change at any moment, he would recommend his being carefully watched. Quiet he prescribed, and as a trial, indulgence to every whim which might present itself, provided, of course, the whim were safe. He whispered some few words in Mark's ear, thinking him the stronger, perhaps; but Margaret saw his cheek blanch, and her own mind was filled with those nameless apprehensions with which it is so difficult to reason. Dr. Arden, having said all that it was necessary

to say, without the least appearance of hurry, wished them kindly good bye, and drove off at the utmost speed of his pair of well-fed horses.

Mark drew Margaret's hand again within his arm, and, after walking two or three times up and down the street in perfect silence, he sighed heavily, and went with her into the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

THAT evening past, and the night bringing none of the changes in Mr. Hamilton which Dr. Arden had anticipated, nothing but the same lethargic, despairing silence, which was neither wakefulness nor sleep. Still Dr. Arden declared himself to be rather more hopeful, when he paid his morning's visit, and the expectations of the Hamiltons rose rapidly, taking the doctor's cautious words for certainties. Margaret alone watched her father with almost the same

anxiety, for she knew well how many months of concealed suffering and remorse had led to the fatal climax of misery. He seemed to her the source of all her care, the cause which alone oppressed her with such untold sorrow; but the death-like stillness of her feelings might have told her, that in vain she tried to assert herself, and teach her pride to forget one to whom her memory clung with a tenacity which could not be shaken off or weakened.

And so another day wore on, and she exerted herself to spread around the little family circle, that cheerfulness and hopefulness, which she herself so little felt, but which seemed so necessary for the recovery of the unhappy patient.

"I am afraid," said Alice, as she walked down stairs by Margaret's side to dinner that day, "that you will feel our fast days more than ever, dear, will you not?"

"Oh, dear no! I ought to feel them less," replied Margaret, winding her arm caressingly round her waist, "for the sea has made me so strong; it is much worse for you, who have had no change."

"I am always strong," said Alice.

"Or rather you have great powers of self-endurance, which enable you to bear things without complaint. You set us a good example."

Alice smiled with pleasure, for, self-sustained as she always was, a compliment from Margaret's truthful tongue was valuable.

They entered the small room together, and this little episode enabled them both to smile pleasantly in reply to Mrs. Hamilton's remark.

"I have but poor fare for you, Margaret, after all your dainty living."

Margaret glanced at the table, it was well arranged with its clean cloth, bright

silver and glass: but the dinner itself consisted of a large dish of potatoes, very nicely boiled, for Mary was an excellent cook, together with salt in an exquisitely cut glass, the remnant of a wealth past, and a mockery to the poverty present.

"This is Olivia's week," said Mrs. Hamilton, "and I must say she never manages the dinner as well as Alice does."

"But Alice gets into debt," said Alice herself, "and Olivia gets her out again."

"Never mind, mamma, there is a rice pudding coming," said Olivia, "with an egg in it, and papa has a sweetbread. I thought it better to leave it by him, though he said he could not eat it. But I will go and see now, for if he still refuses it, you had better have it."

"No, my dear, leave it; if he will not eat it to-day, he may to-morrow. There, it is no use trying!" she said, after tasting a potato, "I shall go, and sit with him."

"Do, mamma, try and eat; wait for the pudding," said every one.

"No, finish your dinners. I have done."

Mrs. Hamilton walked up-stairs, taking with her the flavour, which, poor as it was, had rested upon the potatoes.

"Now, Margaret, what is to be done?" said Alice, laying down her fork.

The difficulty seemed rather beyond Margaret's solving, for she was silent, being, in fact, deeply pained. At last, she said:

"We must have patience, and we must contrive always to have some little nicety for mamma."

"The chances are that she would not eat it, and I almost ruined myself last week by getting good dinners for all," said Alice, "because she said she could not eat unless we did; and to be sure, we lived upon the fat of the land; but then I had to borrow of Olivia to pay for the washing, and as she very rightly refuses to be in

debt, this is the result," she added, glancing gloomily at the dish.

"I am glad Olivia is so strict," said Margaret, looking gratefully at her.

"But it is hard," said Alice, "that we cannot pull together."

"It is indeed," said Margaret, "and yet, to get into debt would be worse still."

"I wish mamma would see," said Olivia, "how hard it would be to have a set of extravagant children, and how thankful she ought to be that we are willing to be careful."

"Well, let's have in the pudding," said the voracious Fred, "and I will take mamma up a piece."

Fred did as he suggested, and returned with the satisfactory information, that the pudding was accepted; but nothing could effectually dissipate the gloom which had now settled over the dining-table.

"Our home is full of trouble, but we

make it worse," said Olivia, "much worse than it need be. Who cares for dining without meat? I do not."

"I think it keeps the brain clear," said Fred.

But Margaret, looking attentively at him, saw, with anguish, that his hand which played so philosophically with the spoon, was very sharp in its outline.

"Ah!" thought she, "we are grown up, but he is a growing boy—if we were to stunt his growth—nay, he must not be stinted."

Poor Margaret always found some one, whichever way she looked, who ought to be exempted from the iron law which she had laid down.

"Have you any drawing paper left to spare me, Margaret?" asked Olivia, when dinner had been cleared away. "Mine is all gone, and," she added, trying to smile, "none can be afforded this week."

"Oh, yes! I have some," replied Margaret, "but how can you find the heart to draw this afternoon?"

"Alas!" said Olivia, "is it a time to neglect an accomplishment?" She looked up with a sad and serious face from the portfolio from which she was choosing a copy; with such a sad and serious face as told clearly that she was going to work no longer for amusement at her favourite study.

Margaret said no more, but fetched the paper from her room, and then stopped to measure, and cut it to exactly the size required, while Olivia arranged her paints, and seated herself with an air which, although very gloomy, was yet determined.

Margaret saw her mood, and sympathized with it, so she remained by her side, looking over the drawings completed in her absence, and finding for each some judicious mark of praise, which made

Olivia's countenance brighten up, and she went on with her drawing with renewed zest.

"I think," said Margaret, gently, "that an honest endeavour is almost sure, when rightly aimed, to bring a blessing with it. See, those lines are as boldly drawn as you could wish them, and timidity has hitherto been your failing. You have never wanted either correctness or finish."

"If I could be certain of that, I should always draw boldly," said Olivia, as she went on rapidly sketching.

"I am going out shopping," said Alice, "does anybody want anything?"

"Want must be our master, I am afraid, if we do," said Fred.

"Nothing, thank you," said both sisters.

"I say, Alice," shouted Fred, as she was going.

Alice looked back, but blushed scarlet, and hastily departed again when he had added, "Take care of yourself. It is a half holiday."

Margaret heard these words uneasily; but when she attempted to get at their exact meaning, Fred vanished, and she soon afterwards went to relieve her mother's hopeless watch up stairs, but thinking still what connection there could be between Alice's walk and Mr. Smith's half holiday.

She took some work with her, some wristbands to stitch for Fred, but the close application necessary for such work soon failed her, and she found her eyes wandering listlessly to the quiet street, whose monotony was scarcely ever disturbed of an afternoon, even by the passing of a butcher's boy. There was an archway dividing the opposite row of houses, where fowls walked up and down peaceably in search of food. It was probably a way leading to stables, but Margaret in her dim knowledge of the neighbourhood, always fancied it led to the dwellings of some of those very poor, who find a hiding place in London. To a happy

mind, there was nothing in the scene out of doors calculated to cause annoyance, but to the spirit preying upon itself, rent with anxieties, and burdened with a heavy grief, there was alike nothing to raise or relieve the feelings, no break in the monotony, which sank like a weight upon her heart. And yet such as this home was, it gradually increased in value in her eyes, as she thought what a blessing it would be, if by any means they could still hold it. Dr. Arden's words were ever present to her, and more, those which, spoken to Mark, were withheld from her. If those which she had heard were dreadful, what were those which she had not heard! So the day wore on. Alice returned, and Olivia's drawing was put away, and the tea was over; and then, upon Margaret's longing ear fell the sound of the well known postman's knock.

There were two letters, both for her, and almost trembling with anxiety she carried

them where she might best read alone, to the window of her father's room. One was directed by Mrs. Daventry, and contained but a few hastily written lines, stating that she was busy in preparing for the journey to London, which, upon her brother's account, she intended taking as soon as possible, and enjoining her to write instant news of him.

The other letter was written in those bold characters peculiar to Mr. Travers, and which once seen were difficult to be forgotten. Short, simple and concise, he wrote, inclosing the expected letter from Lord S——, requesting that Mr. Hamilton would call upon him, when the solicited appointment should be given him. He had evidently not heard of her father's illness, for he made no comment upon it, simply sending him his compliments, and saying that he trusted he would take the appointment offered, until something better presented itself. The letter was couched in such terms as could not have offended the

most critical or suspicious recipient; but, at the same time, it was a letter which Fred might read with as much freedom as herself. It bore, indeed, so directly upon the business, as to leave the writer quite out of the question.

So Margaret read it, at least, and in this she thought she perceived plainly, that he was well contented to acquiesce in those indignant words, which, suggested by a justly excited pride, but not in consonance with the deep love which, in her vain regret, she scarcely tried to control —had yet set him free.

What an agony of suffering there was in those pleading eyes which sought that small track of open sky, visible above the houses, as if asking in utter weakness for pity and for help. How she reproached herself for feeling so utterly wretched, when she held in her hand what was, perhaps, to be the talisman of a happier future, a life

of tolerable competency, an income doubled. But this was no time to think of her own feelings, and pausing, though but a moment, to overcome the full tide of grief, which seemed threatening to overwhelm her, and to give still one tribute of gratitude and admiration to the unflinching kindness of one, who, perhaps, like herself, had been swayed by the accidental circumstances which had parted them; swayed perhaps, so far as his love for her was concerned, but not flinching one inch from the natural benevolence of his character. She now trembled at herself, and acknowledged, for the first time, with a blush of shame, that she had hoped, after her first indignant feelings, and her wish never to see him again, had subsided, that he might follow her, and upon her own ground, where she might have accepted him with dignity, have made those proposals which she felt convinced he had meant to make, long before her aunt's unhappy inter-

ference had rendered her entertaining them impossible. The letter, however, short and polite, and unexceptionable as it was, seemed to her, to banish this hope altogether, and to bring her entirely without resource, to the stern realities of the present and the future. For these she must henceforth nerve her mind, putting, as far as possible, self aside, and turning herself from the brighter visions of womanhood, address herself uncompromisingly to those plain duties which lay before her.

Rising then from her place by the window, she walked softly to her father, and kneeling by his bed, put the letter in his hands.

He opened it with shaking hand, and his fingers trembled and made the paper rustle, as he tried to straighten it before him. How rejoiced then did she feel, when she heard him repeat the words softly to himself. "Who is this Mr. Tra-

vers?" he enquired; and the manner in which he asked the question, was clear and collected. Kneeling still by his bed, Margaret, who had shared his confidence, and given him her own, for so many years, in low words, and with blushing cheek told him the whole story of her friendship with Mr. Travers.

Was he listening? she could scarcely tell, yet it was such a relief to her full heart, to speak to him, who, with all his faults, had ever been pre-eminently an unworldly man, and who if he heard, could understand her so well. But did he hear, not all she said, perhaps, but something must have reached his heart, for he smoothed back the glossy braids of her hair, and patting her head softly, as perhaps he had done some twenty years before, he bade 'God bless her!' in a voice which could scarcely be heard.

Then she found courage, at length, to

say, "You will accept his offer, dear papa, and you will see Lord S——."

He passed his hand uneasily over his forehead, and seemed to sleep. She pressed him still.

"To-morrow!" he said, "I will go to-morrow."

Kissing him with such deep gratitude, and thankfulness, for those simple words, as knew no limit in her filial mind, she went down stairs to tell of the letter, and her father's promise, conferring a happiness which was, perhaps, the greater in proportion as it was short lived.

CHAPTER XIV.

A COUNTRY house in Hertfordshire.

In a large, airy room, handsomely furnished, upon a small iron bed, of the lightest and most fanciful workmanship, lay a young child breathing heavily. Stricken down by the ravages of a dangerous fever, and her flesh burnt and yellow, as by the action of an internal and consuming fire, there was yet brightness enough in the flashing eye to tell that this was a child of singular intellect and beauty. Beauty of face; although, alas!

a painful curvature of the spine rendered her tiny figure a deformity.

It was late in the evening, but the sun sinking so gloriously behind the hills, shed still its golden beams through the open window, and flitted along the spacious floor.

Looking out and listening, with clasped hands, and more and more flushing cheek, the child had been for the last hour, but now she seemed to sleep.

At the window sat an aged woman, whose dress betokened her to be what she was, a housekeeper. Mrs. Somers spoke and looked like one whose earnest integrity of purpose, formed the surest support to the dignity which she so well displayed. The black silk gown and snowy cap might possibly have been her every day costume, but yet, by the little primness about them now, they did not look to be so, but rather showed that she was expecting another

duty, besides that of watching the sick child. Her face was disturbed and anxious, as she listened to the low tones and half whispers of the village nurse, who well skilled in the scene of the sick room, found employment at some time or other in all the houses, rich or poor, of the neighbourhood.

Nurse Winter knew every tale to the credit or discredit of her neighbours, far and near, and it must be acknowledged that in graphic descriptions, and skilful delineations of character, women of her calling are pre-eminently successful. There may be too much circumlocution, too many words and too great repetition of facts, but many an author would be glad if he could tell a tale so vividly, simply and cheerfully, as it is often told by a shrewd village nurse.

The tales in which Mrs. Winter was now indulging were all on the same subject,

all bearing upon second marriage; when, as if confidence deserved confidence, she suddenly exclaimed, with proper emphasis, but yet without raising her voice.

"People say your master is going to be married."

"It may be, and it may not be," said Mrs. Somers, "master is young, and has many years before him. I should not say no, myself, to his taking a wife."

"Provided," said Mrs. Winter, drawing upon her experience, "she were not young and highty-tighty."

"No!" said Mrs. Somers, "she will not be that, I am certain. Master is a good man and a just man, and will not choose any mother for his children, not for the sake of this poor thing only, but for those yet unborn. He might have been married fifty times over before now, if he had chosen," said Mrs. Somers, enjoying a kind of reflected dignity.

"I have heard," observed the nurse, "that either of Lord Lyncomb's daughters would be glad to get him."

"I don't say who would be glad, and who would not," said Mrs. Somers, in a quiet tone, which really asserted more than the most lavish boasting could have done, "but this I do say, that my master was as good a son, and as good a husband, and is as good a father as ever stepped, and it is not he that will do anything foolish to hurt his poor child now."

"Well, it's no knowing!" persisted the obstinate nurse, drawing from her experience again, "but I have known the best of men as have had their heads turned and their hearts too, by a fine young wife."

"I can trust him," said Mrs. Somers, and yet the nurse's words made her feel uneasy; and anxious to put a stop to the conversation, she turned to the bed where the child's restless movements demanded attention.

The little girl looked at her with her strange, large, questioning eyes, and the housekeeper began to fear that she had heard more than was meant to meet her ear, but she merely continued to regard her long and anxiously, and then murmured, as she had done at intervals all day, "Is papa come?" and Mrs. Somers having again soothed her to temporary rest, turned once more to the window to listen, although she had calculated that another two or three hours must elapse before her master could arrive.

"Hark!" cried Mrs. Somers.

"Hush!" cried the nurse, in a tone so loud that every other sound was banished for a moment, and then followed the unmistakable rumble of carriage wheels up the avenue.

"That is he," said Mrs. Somers softly, as she hurried down stairs.

She had reached the hall before the chaise stopped, and was in time to meet her master. With quick impatient movement, she heard

the chaise door flung open, and Mr. Travers sprang up the steps and entered the hall. His face was pale, and deeply marked with lines of anxious thought and care, and he looked like one who had travelled fast and far. The old butler and the housekeeper pressed round him in a manner which shewed, at once, how welcome he was, and how dear he was to them, and what a pleasure there was in performing any little office for his service. His first earnest enquiries were for his child.

"I think, Sir," said Mrs. Somers, "she is in no danger yet; but I did not dare to send for you, knowing how angry you would be, but unless there is danger, Sir, my dear master, there can be no necessity for your seeing her."

"And why not?" he demanded in surprise.

"You know how infectious scarlet fever is," said Mrs. Somers, "and many a dear child

has lived through, what has struck a strong man down. It is always the strongest that fare the worst in fever."

She looked with proud admiration, as she spoke, at the bold, athletic frame of the man, whom as a little child she had nursed and fondled.

There was no danger then yet, as the housekeeper had told him, and Mr. Travers breathed more freely; but he said with that air of quiet determination, which she so well knew to be impenetrable, and yet in the gentlest and most soothing manner.

"Your letter was forwarded to me at the Isle of Wight, and, fearing that in the time so lost, some terrible change might have occurred, I crossed instantly to Portsmouth, engaged a special train to take me to town, and have posted down here as fast as horses could bring me. Do you think I am likely to remain from her, when in the same house?"

"You will take something to eat first, or some brandy," entreated Mrs. Somers.

"I may need supper presently, I will not wait for it now," he said, looking back, for he had reached the door leading to the staircase, and before she could arrest him by another word, he had climbed the stairs with impatient foot, and in a moment more the sick child was in his arms.

Mrs. Somers had well calculated upon her duty, when she had decided, that to keep her master in ignorance of his child's illness would have exceeded any powers she possessed, and she wrung her hands now, with ineffectual grief, but with passionate earnestness as she listened to the receding footstep of him, who from infancy to maturity had ever been her darling young master.

She had spoken truly, when she had said that there was no danger yet; but to her, as well as to him, the very name of the feve

which was wasting his child, brought with it the shadow of death.

Once before it had crossed his threshold, and then, three young lives had yielded themselves up before its pestilential touch. Three coffins had been laid side by side, near to that of the mother in the family vault; and a deepening shadow had settled over the heart of the bereaved father. One only, the youngest, and the deformed, remained.

When Richard Daventry had spoken of the "grown up family" of Mr. Travers, he had meant nothing beyond a very slight exaggeration of language used in the vehemence of passion. He remembered hearing of the death of Mrs. Travers, and of the number and ages of the children left to the widower's care; but when the three young names appeared in the corner of the 'Times,' he was shooting in the Highlands, where he boasted to have left every trace of London

behind him. Nothing had occurred afterwards to point out the fact to him.

To the affectionate heart of Mr. Travers this loss had been heavy; but he was one of those men who let grief lie silently, and never speak of it. He was even fearful of mentioning his one remaining child, lest the memory of the lost ones should be lightly touched upon.

From this feeling, a mistaken one perhaps, but arising simply from an over sensitive mind, it was that Margaret had been left to learn so much of his history from her cousin.

Mr. Travers had waited for no preparation, nor did he fear to startle the patient by coming hastily to her. He knew well that affection is always waiting, and is never very much surprised at the loved one's coming. How right he was in this anticipation might easily be seen, for when Mrs. Somers, having dried her eyes and smoothed

her silk gown, crept into the room again upon tiptoe, she found the child Ada, with her arm thrown round her father's neck, and her head resting upon his breast, fast asleep.

The hours of the night stole on, and Mr. Travers still sat in the same position. Sometimes he watched the sleeping child with tenderness, and then, with the greedy clasp of affection, he drew her closer to him, and softly smoothed the silken hair back from her burning brow, and then again his lips would move in earnest supplication, and across his own brow his hand would travel uneasily, as if to still the agony of uncertainty, with which he looked upon this, his last one, struggling with the fell disease which had left for him such heavy traces behind it, less than two years before.

No mother, tending her sick infant, could have watched more tenderly than he did through that night. He had sent Mrs. Somers and the nurse to rest, with that gentle

and yet steady command, which few liked to disobey, and he now watched alone, and still pillowed in his arms and soothed by the feeling of perfect repose, which his presence had occasioned, Ada slept on. It was not until early morning had broken, and Mrs. Somers, refreshed by sleep, had resumed her watch, that he suffered himself to be persuaded to leave her. He had laid her gently back upon her pillow, lightly shaken by the housekeeper's hand, and then, satisfied in the fact that she still slept, he went down to his library, where an early breakfast, with its hot and refreshing coffee, had been substituted for the supper which he had declined.

He sat himself down, weariedly, for besides the anxiety, which was fresh, and is always active, there was another sorrow pressing like a weight upon his heart, and causing that excessive fatigue to which his strong frame was little subject. There

is always pleasure in returning to a home which has witnessed well regulated exertion, and duties steadily and steadfastly performed, but it struck upon him to-day with a strange feeling of loneliness.

To what his home now was, he had become accustomed, although he might miss the eager prattle of the child, who at all times had such a warm and loving welcome for him, but the void and loneliness which he now felt, he had not found there, it had come home with him.

His breakfast invigorated him, but on recovering from weariness, he became restless, and so, the ordinary household servants not having stirred as yet, he walked through the deserted rooms. One room he looked into first, walked round it, stood at each window, and each time he stopped, mused long and earnestly. This was the nursery, not of his children alone, but of himself, and of his father before him.

There were a thousand memories here, which were difficult to meet with a heart oppressed, and he closed the door softly, and kneeling down by the table, the old study table he knew so well, poured out his overcharged feelings, in deep, faithful, confiding prayer.

When he passed again from that room, he looked more comforted. He descended to the dining-room, which, like every other part of the house, waited his return in perfect order. The furniture here, as every where else, was handsome in its kind, but thoroughly worn, and more than any thing was thoroughly comfortable. The house was evidently made to live in, and be happy in, without show, or fuss, or ceremony. The large round table, looked the very table to which guests from town would come down to sit, and be witty without effort, friendly, without familiarity, and learned, without pedantry. 'The

Cedars,' as Mr. Travers designated his abode, was quite near enough to London to afford him the society which his genial mind and high talents, fitted him to welcome and adorn. Here were frequently held the most happy, unconstrained and friendly meetings of genius and literature.

Beneath the tall firs and stately cedars, (which abounded in the grounds, and which gave a character of natural dignity to the small, but perfectly filled mansion,) the greatest spirits of the day sought and found freedom and intellectual repose.

The grounds themselves were extensive, and the arrangement of the gravel walks, and smooth turf pathways, made them appear still more so; but Mr. Travers possessed no other land. He contented himself with adding everything by which art could minister to nature, in making his grounds more delightful; but he tried for nothing beyond them.

If his friends wanted shooting, fishing, or hunting, they must seek it elsewhere, but if they needed a day's rest, a quiet Sunday, or a social evening out of town, they could scarcely seek it better anywhere than here, nor had Mr. Travers reason to complain of loneliness, or of lack of society, and that of the best which his age could produce, counted, at least, by intellect.

Why then, as he stood at the dining-room window, looking out at the sun rising above 'The Cedars,' did he feel within him such an aching sense of being alone?

The very atmosphere around him was one of well-earned respect and affection. Servants, who had been with him from boyhood, served him still, and regarded him for what he was, not for what he had done. Society might cite his rare talents, kindle at his wit, and make much of his writings, but here, amongst his

simple dependents, these things were forgotten, or regarded merely as appendages to his goodness, and constant nobility of purpose. Surely he was satisfied. What craved he more?

He threw up the window, and sprang through it out upon the lawn, then walking on, he sought repose beneath the shelter of his own stately trees.

The sky was flushed with the first blush of early morning, and from every bush and tree poured forth a joyous song, for the gardens were filled with birds, whose nests here were undisturbed. The flowers, freshened by the dews of night, and brilliant in their richest colours, seemed waiting for their master's hand to gather, or for his eye to admire.

It was a lovely scene. Seldom, even to his sensitive imagination, had the home, which was endeared to him by so many recollections, appeared before him with

more magic beauty. Why, then, did his eyes wander with that long, wistful gaze upon all around him? Why was his pale face raised with such a look of anguish to the sky spread in all its blushing beauty before him?

Beyond this scene of loveliness, what could he ask more?

He turned back, after awhile, restless still, and went again to the large room which was Ada's own healthful chamber.

How hopelessly we watch by the sufferer's side at night; but when morning beams, we almost wonder, and chide ourselves for our over anxiety.

When Mr. Travers entered the room, he perceived instantly that his own and his servant's fears had exaggerated the child's illness. Refreshed by her long sleep, Ada was evidently better, and more at ease. The crisis was past, even before they knew that it had arrived, and she breathed more freely.

"I have been dreaming, papa," she said, when he had taken his seat by her side, "dreaming such a naughty, naughty dream."

"Do not talk, darling, you are not well enough; think how you have frightened me, and take care of yourself and get well."

"Only let me tell you my dream," persisted the child, "and then I will be very quiet."

"Well," said Mr. Travers, impatiently, "but I do not like your talking."

"Only this little bit. I dreamt you were coming home, and I was waiting for you under the cedars. I had my white dress on, for Mrs. Somers would make me look smart, I did not know why, until afterwards; when suddenly, after I had been waiting a great while under the trees, I found myself in the library, and there you were sitting writing, and by your side, all in white and jewels, there was such a beautiful lady. I saw as I looked at her, that you loved her better than

me, and that she had come to steal your love away from me; and (the dream had no periods but was told almost in a breath) this beautiful lady hated me, because she thought you gave me some of your love; but you did not, for she stole it all, and soon you cared for no one but her, no not for your books or writing, (Ada emphasised this as a most dreadful crisis) and so then I said I would die, and so I did; and the beautiful lady put me in a coffin, and put pretty primroses, and snowdrops, and violets in my hand and cried and made believe to be very sorry; but though I was dead, I knew all the time that she was very glad; for she wanted none to love you, and for you to love none but herself. That," said Ada, drawing a long breath, "was the dream, and was it not a naughty one?"

"A very naughty one," said Mr. Travers, sighing heavily, "for I am afraid it shews me that my child wants none to love me but herself."

"It was the white lady who thought that, not me," said Ada, wonderingly.

"But the dream sprang from a jealous heart, my child, and was, indeed, a naughty dream."

"Oh, no, papa! the lady was naughty, and was glad when I died."

"Or, you thought she was. Ah! my little one, beware of a jealous heart. Whatever I love, you must love, so that there may never come a division of hearts between us; and when Ada finds the gallant knight she is so fond of talking about, with his golden spurs and the black plume in his helmet, I will try and love him almost as much as she does."

The child looked half convinced, and yet she clung pertinaciously to her point.

"But, papa, you will never love any one better than me?"

"I will never cease to love you, as well as I do now, my little one, provided always

that you are willing to do your duty by me, Ada; but," he added, sternly, "remember this, that I despise a jealous heart."

"Why," thought he, "should her mother's curse cling to her?"

Ada sank back exhausted, pondering yet, as might be seen from those large eyes, in which lay such strange thoughtfulness, so much beyond her years. He stooped to feed her with the sweet hot-house grapes which were near, and gently to soothe her with soft words and loving hand. He would not leave her while yet the remembrance of the "naughty dream" clung to her fancy and disturbed her, and very soon she had quite forgotten it, and was busy only in admiring him as she always did, with almost idolizing affection, as she lay back dreamily upon her pillow.

Then he turned away. Had he listened to Nurse Winter's conversation the night before, he would have possessed an easy clue to the

child's dream. Now he only regarded it as an idle imagination, though it chimed in, almost with superstitious feeling, with the nature of his thoughts.

It opened to him, however, a new train of reflection, and he was not the man to shrink from any subject presented for his consideration.

Again and again through the long day which followed, he thought of the "naughty dream."

CHAPTER XV.

It was evening.

Kate Lyndhurst sat in her pretty drawing-room working. She was very fond of needle-work, it was a womanly occupation, and it suited her simple, womanly mind. She worked well and usefully, and her needle was generally at the service of some young mother, amongst her many friends, who was very glad to take advantage of it.

It was a very useful, brisk, bright needle, and a pretty little white hand that used

it, and the air of sweet humility and perfect contentment about her altogether was more than beauty, far. There was just a little timid flush upon her cheek, and a little sparkling of the soft brown eye, to mark the happy thoughts, which flitted through her mind, like the soft breeze playing with summer flowers.

Mark Hamilton was dining there to day, and she was remembering now, how he had grasped her hand when they had met, and to herself, she could count up each glance, and the very shadow of a tone which had spoken of any deeper interest than ordinary. She wondered now whether he would come up before Miss Tindale, who had promised to come in time for tea. No! Miss Tindale was always early; and there she was knocking at the door, for the distance between the houses was small, and therefore she generally walked in.

Kate knew that there were numberless wrappers and overshoes to be set aside, and she rose with the intention of meeting her and accompanying her to her room, to stand by and watch these little arrangements, as the friendship said to exist between them demanded; but just then Mark's step upon the stairs made her heart beat quicker, and as he came in, she resumed her seat, and left Miss Tindale to take off her bonnet without this proof of her regard.

Mark walked up to the table where Kate was working, and said with a little air of petulance which was foreign to him.

"I hoped you would be alone to-night."

"So we are," replied Kate, looking up with her pretty flush, "it is only Miss Tindale. You know her."

"Her good spirits are so constant, that they are fatiguing."

"I thought you always got on so well together," said Kate.

"Oh! it does not signify, of course; only, when I find you and your uncle alone, it is more homelike and pleasant."

"I thought you might be tired of finding us always alone," said Kate, with a little womanly affectation which was meant to be contradicted; and she is so clever, and can talk to you so much better than I can."

"One does not like talking cleverly always," said Mark, now smiling good-humouredly. "But, in truth, I am out of spirits, and should have declined coming, only that you let me be so much at home, that my mind finds more rest here than anywhere else."

"I am so glad that you find it so," said Kate, looking up with a bright light in her eyes. "Miss Tindale calls me the

'home-bird.' I am afraid she does not mean to be very complimentary; but yet I like the name."

"She could not have found a better," said Mark; and when Miss Tindale came in, he greeted her with that pleasant suavity of manner which made him so great a favourite with her.

Miss Tindale did not look half so well in undress as she did when properly arrayed for a ball-room appearance. Made up with feathers and cosmetics, and a handsome dress, she still looked, not only well, but remarkably well. Of an evening at home, however, or upon such little occasions as drinking tea with Kate, she did not appear to very much advantage. Some people at eighty are so far in the fashion as to escape remark; but Miss Tindale had some little pet fashions of her own, which defied time or change. She had also an odd habit of

perpetually diving into cheap drapery shops, and purchasing most excellent and wondrous bargains of things she never really wanted.

These things being purchased, of course, it was economical to wear them out, and so she did most honestly and scrupulously, to the no small damage of her appearance. Kate was always too much afraid of "her friend" to attempt to graft upon her mind any of her sweet, simple rules in dress; and therefore she quieted her regret upon this subject by remembering that few looked better than Miss Tindale did when equipped for dancing.

Her love of cheap shops and great bargains was always an open subject between her and Mark, for he was very fond of quizzing and usually saved, for her advantage, all the wonderful advertisements upon the subject which fell in his way. But he was in no humour for quizzing that night, and he felt the graver because Miss Tindale so

evidently expected, that he would take up the battledore and return the shuttlecock of wit, which she threw at him. Kate was right in thinking that he talked more cleverly to her friend, but she had a little happy consciousness that, with her, his vigorous mind found the composure and rest which his active temperament required.

"And so," said Miss Tindale, as they drew round the tea-table, "poor Jasper's trial comes on to-morrow. I have been quite tired of waiting for further evidence, and am so glad it is to be settled at last. What a tedious time the poor fellow must have had in prison! Do you know, a friend of mine has promised to take me to the Old Bailey to-morrow. Mind, I shall quiz you awfully."

"I shall only be too proud of such a listener."

"Now, really, you don't mean that? but then, such pretty little compliments make

life go smoother, oil the wheels as it were; but, indeed, I mean to quiz, and then come and tell Kate all about it. Do you feel nervous?"

"Only at the thoughts of your criticism. But are you really going? I am afraid the place is not very tempting for a lady."

"Yes! but indeed it is; for I am, you know, truly interested in Jasper and his pretty wife, who I fear, after all, is going into a consumption, her colour is so bright —too bright for one who is in trouble, that is, to be natural; and then, you know, Mr. Hamilton, I want to hear you speak. Do you mean to depend upon your wit, or upon the evidence?"

"Upon a little of both," said Mark, quietly.

"And how does your cousin like the thoughts of your appearing against him?"

"He takes it all in the way of busi-

ness," he said evasively, "but I have not seen him lately."

He might have told of the unnecessary energy in the prosecution which his cousin displayed, amounting to an almost dogged determination to show himself in the right, and that no opinion of his, however quickly formed, could be susceptible of error. It was difficult to tell whether Margaret's rejection of his suit influenced in any way his determination to beat the brother, who was so firmly bent upon opposing him; but it is almost certain that Margaret, even had she returned his love, could not have turned him from any settled purpose. His friends called Richard a very firm man; his enemies, and he had a host of them, gave his firmness a different name, and called it obstinacy.

Mark's natural good feeling, however, prevented him, at all times, from exposing, to mere acquaintances or friends, the faults of his relatives; and, therefore, Miss Tindale's

question, which might have elicited a great deal of interesting information as to his cousin's weakness, fell to the ground altogether.

It was finally arranged by Miss Tindale, that she should persist in her intention of witnessing the trial, and that, as soon as it should be over, she should hasten back with the intelligence of its results to Kate, who declared that she had not the courage to go herself. Perhaps she shrank from exposing the double interest she now felt in this first trial of Mark's skill. She hoped he might linger a little after her friend left, but Miss Tindale secured his services as an escort home. Indeed, she she had always been so clever in securing the services of gentlemen for such little occasions, that the only wonder was that she had hitherto failed to secure them for a permanency. But so it was, and in right good humour she kissed Kate, and

started off, in a great state of happiness, by the side of the thoughtful Mark, whose home troubles had fallen too heavily upon him to make him a fit companion for any but those who loved him with that sincerity which overlooks the humour, and accepts the *man* in any mood.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE morrow when Mr. Hamilton had promised he would exert himself, and which Margaret had anticipated with so much chastened joy and happy confidence, came and lingered, and then sighed itself away, and dying gave birth to other morrows equally fruitless and disappointing. To any question urged upon him, he replied ever quietly, "To-morrow, I will go to-morrow!"

As day followed day, the strong necessity

for his rousing himself impressed itself upon every one. An honourable employment, and a competency sufficient to remove his family from absolute need and dependence, waited simply for the formality of a call upon Lord S——. The action seemed so easy, the execution so small; it was hard and difficult to believe that the husband and father was unequal to such a simple effort. The stake to them was that of every thing against nothing, and therefore it is not to be wondered at, that every other interest, every other work was merged in this, "Oh! that papa would try and go!"

Slowly, very slowly, for the young despair with difficulty, the truth dawned upon Margaret, that it could not be, that they were asking an impossibility, that he could not grant their request. Then she tried to persuade her mother of the fact; but the more she did so, the more her mother became irritated and impatient. It was

all nonsense, he must get up and go. She knew him well, he only required "to have these things buffetted out of his head." Margaret listened in extreme distress, persuasion seemed of no avail; and how was it possible to exercise authority with her own mother? She spoke in confidence to Dr. Arden, and his orders for quiet for his patient were followed until the latter seemed to rally, and then the precaution failed.

It was Saturday evening. What a weary week that Saturday ended! How slowly had its days and hours passed away! what weary eyelids had closed at night! what watching anxious thoughts had started into life with every waking morning! It seemed like a life time to look back upon to Margaret, as she sat in her little bedroom, which was next to her father's, and was the only other room upon the same floor. She had been so busy all day, that she was now engaged in mending some portion

of her slender wardrobe; and she was glad that this occupation would last until the clock should announce the commencement of the holy Sabbath hours, for she was restless and uneasy. Mrs. Hamilton had refused to allow her to sit up in her father's room, as she was anxious to do, and yet had retired to bed fretful and out of temper. The brother and sisters had gone off to their rooms, Mary was fast asleep, and now every noise lulled, and not a passing step along their retired street to break the silence, the slightest movement or word could be heard by her excited ear. Ah! her nervous system trembled as if she heard the quick falling of the lash. Her mother was scolding, trying with bitter, biting sarcasm, to wake to life the slumbering faculties of her husband. Margaret sprang to her feet, but for what? to humiliate her own mother by her remonstrances! and, perhaps, he heeded not, for there was no answer, only she thought she heard

a low groan; she sprang to the door, but all was still. Then again, Mrs. Hamilton's voice was raised in bitter, cutting reproach. She bade him wake to see them starve, and rouse his coward heart, which would not look upon misfortune, and see them die.

Oh! did he hear; and could his wandering senses take in the meaning? She tried to open the door, but it was fastened, and then her mother hastily, and rather in a frightened manner asked, "who was there?"

"It is I, Margaret: dear mamma, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, child, go to bed."

Margaret crept back trembling; but though she set her door open and listened, there was no further sound.

Agitated and oppressed, weeping bitterly, wringing her hands in agonised supplication she sat down to watch.

Tic-a-tic, tic-a-tic, went the large clock upon the stairs, as if it would say—take

comfort, nothing speaks to the passing night, but my voice; and still Margaret watched. Wearied, at length, by her agitation, and the fatigue of a long and anxious day, she felt that she must sleep; and she laid down, but without undressing, upon her bed.

The night was very sultry, and bright and beautiful stars were shining in the summer sky, but not a breath of air stole through the open window to fan the wearied brow of the poor girl. She slept, and the stars faded, and before it could well be called night, the twilight announced the early coming of the day. It was cooler now—not much; but the heat was a little less intense.

Suddenly there is a flush upon her pale cheek, and her breathing is quickened, then she starts up, wakes, and listens. It must have been the turning of the key of the next room door that wakened her, or

she would not have heard that stealthy, creeping step descending the stairs. Her mother wanted something, and was gone down. No! oh no! the cheap and slender fastenings of the front door were but too easily undone, the step went out, and the door closed behind it, with the sharp, quick sound, she knew so well. It was but the work of a very few seconds, to rise, slip on her shoes, and run down stairs. On her way down, she remembered that she was going into the street, and she turned out of her way, to take from the peg in the side passage, her garden bonnet and shawl which hung there. She put them on, as she went out, opening the street door, and closing it with sufficient noise, as she hoped, to wake all the sleepers she left behind her. She strained her eager eyes in every direction, and far before her the figure of a man was dis-

tinctly visible. She could not be deceived, for her sight was quick and sure, and she hurried after it. To gain upon her father, and link her arm in his, and gently lead him back, that was her desire, as she fleetly followed him. There was a policeman strolling at no little distance, but to ask his services, would, she believed, cause a shock to her poor father's weakened mind, and, for herself, no pain or trouble seemed too great to ward off anything like the risk of exposing him to common remark. Wrapping her shawl closer round her, and feeling a kind of defence in her old straw bonnet, she passed the policeman without speaking, and walking quietly until he had turned the corner near, she again moved on at a pace sufficiently rapid to keep her father in sight. To run would be, she feared, to alarm him into increasing his own speed, and might

attract attention, although the hour, half of night and half of morning, was the quietest of the whole twenty-four.

Still the dark figure, in front of her, preserved the distance between them; he had taken the long, straight Downham Road in its country direction, and now kept steadily on. Perhaps his heart ached for the quiet fields, perhaps—oh, mercy! Margaret hurried on with feverish impatience. Faint signs of the country now began to shew themselves, or rather, perhaps, the road looked as if it had been a real country road once.

The turnpike on the Dalston Road, which now divides one long street of irregular houses from others so like in character, that the pedestrian might lose his way, from their very sameness, looks still as if it had been once a country turnpike, forming, perhaps, the boundary to some solitary village.

So, also, the sign post which points the way with its long arms, might once have stood upon a lonely road, where information could be little hoped for by the stray traveller. It points one arm now towards Shoreditch, another back into Islington; the two others bear country names, though the streets are still so closely set that they might be leading back again to the city.

Margaret noticed little of all this, except perhaps as a matter of feeling; but as the figure before her went on, she followed with a lighter tread. A breeze stole now from country fields, and there was a fresh sweet smell of the early morning, wafted from cottage gardens. Her senses became more collected, and she gained, at length, in the pursuit. Now she looks up and sees the pleasant, but so fatal, River Lea winding its way amongst the grassy meads, and her steps quicken—faster—yet faster.

There, lies the smooth towing path by its side. Will he go that way?

He gains upon it—he stands upon the brink of the glistening, clear, but dangerous waters. He has reached the river, the object of his search for those weary miles; he pauses yet a moment, lifts his hands above his head as if in frantic prayer, and—Margaret's arms are round his neck; her head upon his bosom; and to arrest him, there is not a stronger hand in all the world.

He holds her to him closer and closer still, and as he bends his head to meet her upturned loving face, his tears fall thick and fast, as he murmurs scarcely above his breath.

"Have you saved me sgain. Oh! my child, I thought to rest—rest—"

He pointed with one hand to the water, which passed them in its scarcely perceptible current, ever smooth and still.

Margaret drew him away, ever gently, ever soothingly, she led him back, not speaking much, only a few words now and then, for mingling with an agitation which it was difficult and almost impossible to control, was a feeling of gratitude deep and strong. They walked now so quietly, his arm in hers, that none who met them could have told how they had both passed that road before; they seemed but strolling to watch the opening of the Sabbath morning. He was, as he always had been, so gentle, almost obedient to her, that she found no difficulty now, except that he faltered often, and seemed out of breath, and fatigued. The sun was riding high in the heavens, and already its rays were oppressive. She was becoming more and more tired, and the hand upon her arm more and more heavy, and more heavy still. Wearily through Kingsland, and dragging heavily through the Downham Road, they

went on, and now their own street is reached, and—home. More and more reluctantly did Mr. Hamilton move along the pavement, and, often, before they came to the door, he stopped and hesitated. Oh! if he were to insist upon turning back now, and force her to call for assistance! He walks up the steps painfully, at last; the door is open; some one has been watching for them.

He turns upon the last step, and looks slowly up and down the short, dull street; that look expressed exceeding horror both at himself and all about him, and seemed to ask "is this my home?"

He turned slowly round again, tottered forward a step or two, and then fell insensible across his own threshold.

CHAPTER XVII.

LAZILY the waves washed the shores of Hastings, and very still was the hitherto busy beach, in the afternoon repose of what should have been its unbroken Sabbath rest. Some had gone to church in the town, others had strolled to places of worship far over the distant country, some had gone for long walks across the downs, all leaving behind them a silence which awakened thought.

And Aunt Ann was thinking, sitting before her open window, in the comfortable dining-

room, so lately gladdened by the voice of Margaret, whose joyous sense of life, whose fresh hopefulness had too surely been checked and damped by her.

And, in this moment, when self alone was her accuser, it signified not very much that she had meant everything for the best, the thing was done, and Margaret was gone to her wretched home with a breaking heart. No further explanations could avail now, and if they could, Mr. Travers was also gone, he had left her almost as rapidly as Margaret had done.

She had another cause for anxiety in her brother's illness; and so thinking, her memory retraced the past. She remembered how flighty and unsettled she had been since the bankruptcy; she had been so accustomed to depend upon her brother, that in his dependent character she could not recognize him. He had been always so kind to her, so ready to befriend her, and to extricate her from the

difficulties into which, notwithstanding her ample income, she was perpetually falling, so ever at hand to screen her from the consequences of her own imprudence. And when his time of trial came, when the world had fallen from him, and he from the world, when ruin had dogged his steps, and poverty had closed in upon him with iron grasp, had she stepped in boldly to his help, sheltered his poor breaking heart from the cruel blast of misfortune, and furnished rest for his aching head, until, renovated and invigorated, he had risen to make his way in the world afresh.

Alas, no! He was fitful, and had refused help; but might she not have pressed it upon him, forced him to yield, and not have left his poor spirit to break beneath a load too heavy for him to bear.

Then a bright colour tinged her pale cheek, and she started up with a noble resolve.

She would go to him, she would share all

she had with him, and if that still left him poor, she would be poor with him, anything better than the aimless life of frivolity and waste she had been living. It was not too late. She would go to-morrow; she wished she might go to-night. *It was not too late.* What mocking echo rang the words so in her ear. What step was that up the Croft, what quick hand upon the gate. A handsome youth in becoming uniform advancing to the open window with a letter, nothing more; but Aunt Ann buries her face in the sofa cushions, and weeps as if she might never lift up her head again. This gay youth is the messenger of the telegraph, in spite of all his jaunty look, the unwelcome bearer of ill-tidings.

The message, with its mournful intelligence, was thus couveyed :

"My father has had a stroke of paralysis, but still lives. Your presence would be a comfort to us.

"MARK HAMILTON."

Miss Anstruther returns from the afternoon service in time to hear this ill news, and aid in the hurried preparations for a journey to town. Aunt Ann persuades her to fulfil a waiting engagement, but nothing will induce her to leave her to pursue their journey alone, so as evening comes on, they go up to town together.

CHAPTER XVIII.

They lifted him tenderly from the ground upon which he had fallen, with tears and broken words, and exclamations of grief, and carried him to his bed, from which it seemed but little likely that he would ever rise again.

Poor Mrs. Hamilton, more poor and pitiable because she had been so grievously in error, found no tears sufficient to wash out the fault, which no word or reproach from her noble-minded child called to her remembrance.

What she had suffered in the interval between her waking, and the moment when she first learnt of his return by the sound of his heavy falling, as one struck dead, no tongue can tell, or pen narrate. It was sufficient reproof. In the insensible form lying before her, she saw now, only the dear lover of her youth, the too indulgent husband and friend.

The trial of our faith is never harder than we can bear, neither is the sorrow sent, inadequate to the need, or too heavy to do us good. Sad as was the season, dreadful as had been the reminder, she felt now a more perfect submission to their evil fortune, and a more complete peace with him, than had visited her, since the loss of wealth and ease had drawn forth evil passions, which so often sleep like vipers in the sunny paths and flowery ways of the world.

The greatness of the calamity shut out

all minor troubles and forethought for the first few hours, at least, and brought, in its extinction of all other disquietudes and interests, a kind of heavy and lethargic rest.

"Dear lady," said Dr. Arden, as Margaret followed him to the little drawing-room, "take comfort! Providence is always kind, and this seizure, terrible as it appears to you now, is the only remedy remaining for a still more terrible disease; pray, pray let this conviction give you comfort. Nature has wrecked the body to save the mind.

He took her hand in both his: her poor, cold, trembling hand. She looked too spent with fatigue, anxiety and suffering to give him any direct answer; but she raised her eyes with a look of exquisite gratitude. He could not tell what her affectionate heart had suffered in that long walk, to and from, the Lea; but he saw that she comprehended him now, and

as he led her to the arm-chair, and bade her rest, and promised to come again and see "his old friend" that day, he blessed her softly as he went away.

Margaret pressed her hands to her forehead, and bowed her head. Already the bells of the different churches were ringing for morning service, and they seemed to speak to her, and softly murmur, "Rest." But still she acted over again the morning's walk, and realized with fearful certainty the apprehensions, which, in the hurry and confusion of her mind, had then appeared more visionary.

It was like a dream, then; a terrible reality, now. Why had she not overtaken him before? Why was she so afraid of speaking to that policeman? Ah! she had been right. No one could have followed him more gently, watched him more devotedly, than she had done. No one would have tracked his steps with so much patience,

or given him so long a chance of recovering his self-possession in the undisturbed solitude of his flight. No one, arresting his steps, could have delayed longer than she had done, or interfered more effectually, and yet she would now have given anything to shut out from her remembrance that one moment, when, her arms about his neck, she had turned her father from his fatal purpose. She fancied as she sat thus and thought, that her own mind was reeling, and must give way. So great had been the tension of her nerves, that the very quiet of the little room and the dull street, fell upon her senses like pain. She tried to consider, and to be grateful for what Dr. Arden had said, "Nature has wrecked the body to save the mind," but she could not; she could only remember with something like comfort, that her father, however suffering, was safe, and carefully watched. She knew that they had carried him to bed, and that she had heard that it was no fainting fit, as

she had supposed, but a stroke of paralysis. So distressing had been the apprehensions which had before harrowed her mind that this would have been a relief, terrible, but still a relief, if she could but have realized it; but she could not. Mrs. Hamilton had bade her rest and watch for Mark, who had promised to come early that morning, and break to him the intelligence of his father's dangerous illness. His knock startled her, and knowing that Mary had been instructed to leave to her the task of breaking to him the distressing news, she rose to meet him, struggled hard to command her voice and collect her thoughts, and to remember what words to use, when all were hard to hear; but as she did so, her thoughts seemed to wander in still greater confusion, the light of the bright summer morning became suddenly dim, and, instead of uttering a word, she moved forward but a step or two, and then sank senseless into his arms.

Mark was greatly terrified. What had happened? Olivia came in at that moment, and holding Margaret still lying upon his arm, he eagerly turned to her.

"Oh, Mark!" cried Olivia, alarmed at his ghastly stare, which scarcely looked like sanity, "has not Margaret told you?"

"What?"

"Oh, Mark! you frighten me. Poor papa. Oh, Margaret! is she dead?"

"Tell me what is the matter," said Mark, with forced calmness, "Margaret has only fainted."

Olivia began hesitatingly to explain; but she could not bring her words coherently together. At that moment Margaret regained her consciousness with a heavy sigh, and lifting her head murmured, though in a whisper which reached him alone,

"Only paralysis. I should have told you, but this foolish faintness overpowered me."

"Thank God!" murmured Mark.

What a heavy load of apprehension had rolled away from his mind! That one word, only, strangely inapplicable to the occasion, as it seemed, was sufficient to explain the terrible agony which both had endured; there was no need of extended confidence, they understood each other even too well. This stroke, heavy as it was, was the work of an Almighty hand; it was not a sin, and might and should be borne.

CHAPTER XVII.

Once again we look in upon the quiet chambers in Chancery Lane, where Mark Hamilton is sitting alone. It is night, and the lamp is burning brightly upon the table, although through the open window the night breeze is playing freshly, so freshly that it scarcely seems that it can have passed over the still bustling streets of the crowded city. Mark is not at work, although his lamp is lighted, but, turning from it, he watches the

quiet stars, which with varied light twinkle forth from the quiet sky.

He is silently reviewing the events of the past day. Again he sees himself in the crowded court, and remembers how he sat overwhelmed with the great trouble which only the day before had broken upon him. How he sat thinking, not of the cases before him, nor of the one in which he would soon be called upon to plead; not of the poor man whose character and happiness depended upon him; not of any present object, however absorbing a first display of forensic ability must ever be.

No; he was wandering back to times long gone by, long ago, until now forgotten. A child again he sat upon his father's knee, and remembered well the look of paternal love, which ever greeted him at night when banking hours were over. His boyhood, too, was passing before him, he was riding again

on his tiny pony of a summer evening by that father's side, knowing all the time that of all that father's wealth, there was nothing of which he was more proud than of himself.

He had always had an inward consciousness, that although his father was no classical scholar himself, it would be the great pride of his life if his son became one. Therefore he had worked until learning became its own reward, though this had never rendered to him less dear the praise and almost gratitude of his much loved parent. He remembered well, how year after year, when the prizes were given at Merchant Tailors' (where, by his own choice, he had been educated), how his heart beat as he walked up the room to receive his prize, each year increasing in value, and how it pleased him, more even than the great fact of seeing his name in the paper, to know what a happy man his dear father was that day.

Then, when at Oxford, what a pleasant correspondence they had kept up, the father

in his simplicity placing himself so far below his talented son, and yet, by this very humility, winning so much more honour for himself.

He knew that Jasper's solicitor watched him nervously; he knew that he was thinking of the folly of trusting such a case to an untried hand, and that he endeavoured to rouse him by some unimportant observations on the impending trial, but the dream was too strong for him, and would take its course. Again they were together, that father and himself, and he saw him sitting in his rooms at Oxford, while the tears which would not be restrained burst from his eyes. Those were tears of joy, Mark was a "double first man" that day, and the father's heart was full of gratitude and love to overflowing. Sadly then flitted on the dream amidst the murmur of the busy court. He was at Rome, on classic ground, feeling, enjoying, enthusiastic, Oxford laurels yet green upon his brow; and before him, to his honest am-

bition, the world, all of it at least which he cared for, within his grasp. What could a man of his tried ability want but money to secure success, and the banker's purse was inexhaustible, and the father's liberality untiring! Again the dream went sighing on. He sat in his chambers alone, the friends of prosperity grown cold, or, having seen the chicanery of Barnes and Jones, suspicious. Excuses are easy for leaving the man who is going down hill to go on his way without let or hindrance; and instead of meeting with support, Mark had found himself deserted, save by a chosen band of cotemporaries, who were as untried in the world of business as himself. And now—and now, he, his father, the one companion of the dream, lay insensible, fluttering between life and death; and living or dying, Mark must take his place now, for he would work no more.

Hush—but a moment and the dream is gone! but a moment, and Mark is himself, for

Jasper, pale and sorrow stricken, is standing there, and with eyes fixed upon him, seems asking him for what is more than life—his good name.

The case was opened, and seemed so circumstantial and plain as scarcely to admit of a defence, and Richard Daventry glanced up at Mark with his cool obstinate look, which was always so provoking, as if to say, I am right as I always am; but the dream is gone, and Mark is awake, cool, warm, witty, sarcastic, eloquent, touching and effective.

Richard has sworn that the gold snuff box found in Jasper's box is his, that he left it on his dressing-table when he went out to dinner, and missed it on his return, that he had given Jasper leave to spend the evening out, that coming home, and missing his snuff-box, his suspicions having been previously excited by the loss of a ring of great value, his anger was aroused, and he had insisted on

its being found. Mary, the housemaid, upon whose integrity Richard relied with a confidence intimately allied to his usual obstinacy, had thrown out some insinuations against Jasper, as being the last seen in his master's room, which, after much angry recrimination, had led to the sending for a policeman, and the searching of Jasper's boxes. In one of these the snuff-box was proved to have been found, and the case for the prosecution seemed unanswerable, until exposed to the fire of Mark's cross examination.

It so happened, that among the suspicious articles taken possession of by the police, was a silver thimble.

Upon the evening in question, Mr. Daventry's women-servants had been sitting together at work. Mr. Daventry had gone out to dinner, and his servant, Jasper, had left the house half-an-hour afterwards, to spend the evening with his wife. Mary, the housemaid, was as busy as the rest,

but after working for an hour, she left the kitchen, and went upstairs, remaining absent for about a quarter of an hour.

Upon her return, she seated herself at her work again, but instantly complained that she had lost her thimble, which, she said, she had left on the table with her work. A search was made for it, but the thimble was nowhere to be found, and Mary, after making some awkward attempts to continue her sewing, had volunteered her services as newspaper reader to the little company of workers.

This thimble was found in Jasper's box, and it was proved that Jasper left the house before the loss of the thimble, and was not allowed time to go up stairs upon his return at night, before the accusation was made against him.

One other fact was also proved, which was, that the key of Mary's box would unlock that of Jasper.

These were the two facts upon which Mark founded his defence, and these were ably supported by a brilliant cross-examination. Richard himself was made to witness to the long years of Jasper's service in his uncle's family, and to many little acts of his which spoke his honesty, of large sums of money entrusted to his keeping, and of other responsibilities which rendered his dishonesty extremely improbable, while Mary was so entirely baffled and confused, that in seeking to refute fancied accusations, she almost criminated herself.

The result was not long doubtful. Jasper was declared innocent, and Mary was taken into custody. Mark remembered well the anger of Richard, concealed beneath his pompous exterior, and could well believe, how irritated he would be, even in the matter of a favourite servant, to

have it supposed that he was capable of being deceived.

Sitting in his quiet chambers looking out, he remembered this as if it were again before him, he felt even now the grasp of Jasper's hand, and his hearty gratitude; he remembered, too, that more than one brief had been pressed upon him before he left the court, and he knew that he had shewn his powers, and made the beginning of that future which, but a few years afterwards, wrote him down as one of the most celebrated men at the bar.

But this consciousness came now accompanied by no fever fit of triumph, no rapid pulse, no lightly beating heart. Years to come, he might look back upon this moment with such feelings; he was too heavy with sorrow to entertain them now.

He was thankful that Jasper was saved, and that this would be good news to Kate Lyndhurst's feeling heart. He was preparing to struggle on, taking this first success as a comfort and a hope, but no more. He was too old since yesterday for the boyish elation which might have visited his heart in another mood.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The trial of Jasper and its successful termination biased the whole after professional career of Mark Hamilton. He had, hitherto, believed that his love of reading, and great powers of steady application had fitted him, more especially, either for Chancery or Chamber practice. But, once tried, it was soon apparent that the Common Law was the field in which his genial humour, his ready tact and quick wit were to display themselves. Long laid by and passed over, he had learnt to

despair; but now he was to find himself slowly but surely rising to notice. Friends, who had long forgotten the very existence of the unknown man, would soon be glad to offer him business, and to follow the lead, which they seldom if ever take, and Mark would find himself a rising man. A rising man, however, implies many long struggles and drawbacks; and to begin with, Mark had the thought of father, mother, sisters and brother, who were become suddenly dependent upon him.

This met him upon the very threshold of the better fortune which was opening before him.

What then of Kate Lyndhurst?

It was an anxious question asked over and over again. It haunted him in his quiet chambers, it woke with the sunshine streaming in through the yellow blinds, it lived in the pale moonlight when he tried to meet it courageously and alone. It clung to him in

the crowded court, and was found written in his briefs. How could he set it aside? As many an honest, but mistaken, man has done before and since. "I will see her no more," for so he reasoned. "However much I love her, I have no right to entangle her, with her fair expectations, into an engagement with one, hampered as I now am beyond the hope of rescue, except by the work of years." To live upon her fortune while he worked for his family, was to him such an impossibility, that he never once calculated upon its practicability. "She would forget him," so he argued, and however dear their short acquaintance had been to him, it would soon be forgotten by her, for he had bound her by no word or promise, "He never said he loved."

It was a trial, a hard and bitter trial to him, it aged him more than any other of the many sorrows he had had to meet, but he thought this was the most straightforward course, and he followed it.

And was he right? Even now, looking with the power of authorship into both hearts, we are puzzled as to the verdict. Certain, however, it is, that while Mark went on his way, a sadder man, the very life and light of joyousness seemed quenched in the heart of Kate Lyndhurst. Had he told his love and so gone on alone, she might have borne it better, for her affectionate heart would have retained its dignity; but now its very pride and hope were gone, for she had given her maiden love in vain.

He knew, perhaps, that if conscience had not forbidden him, he might have put forth his hand and taken to his bosom the jewel which, with its lustrous light, would shed its pure rays round his hearth and home.

But she knew that "men were deceivers ever," and she carried with her the conviction that, not only was she parted from one who had already taught her to love him,

but that her gentle womanly dignity was lowered and trailed in the dust.

Who, we say again, may pronounce the verdict; but oh, strong man! strong in virtue and in conscious right, remember always how dependent upon you is woman, and if it be possible, screen her from that self-humiliation which we have often heard confessed to be the greatest earthly sorrow, which in her single life, she is called upon to bear.

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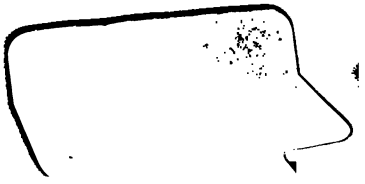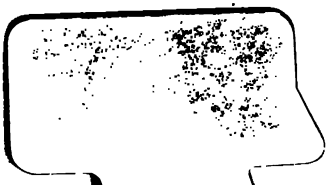
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